

► 10th Anniversary Special—Contests, Prizes! ◀

Video Review®

JANUARY 1990

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SNEAK PREVIEW

1990's Breakthrough Products

The 10 Greatest
Comedies on Video—
A Collector's Guide

Budget Movie Rip-off:
Read This Before You
Buy Your Next Tape

CONTESTS: Video Trivia,
The Best Home Movies

LAB TESTS: VCRs,
Camcorder, Giant TV



JVC's 'concept C'
prototype: Will this
TV/camcorder combo
make full-size
gear obsolete?

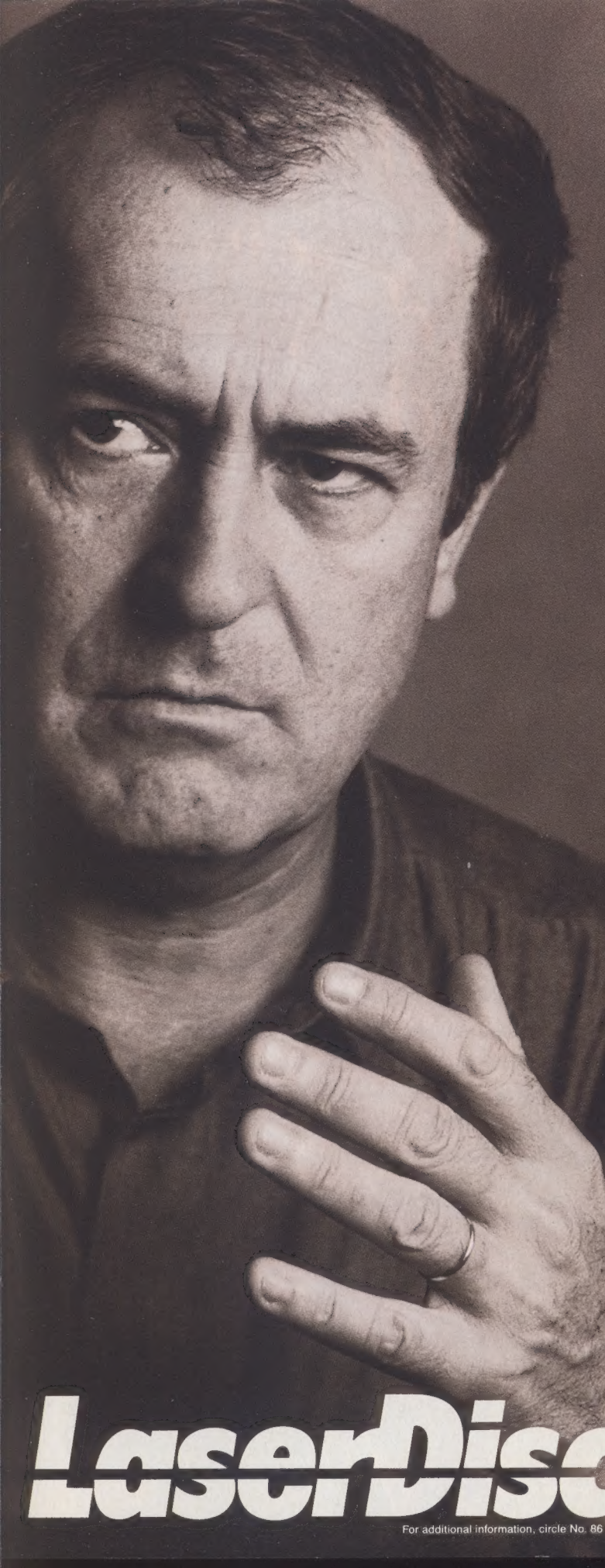
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*1987 Best Picture, The Last Emperor.

LaserDisc

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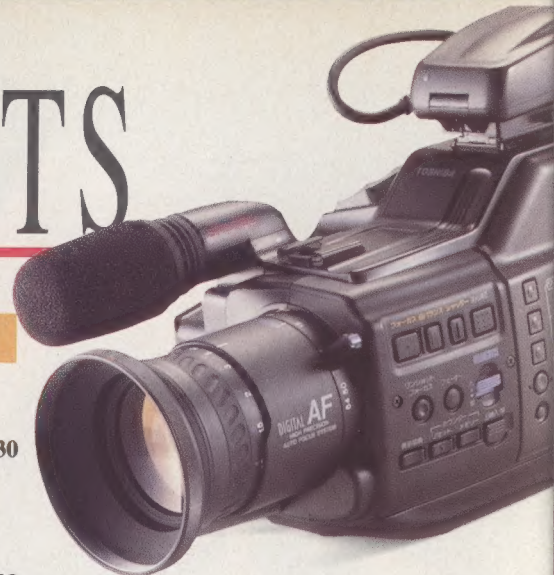
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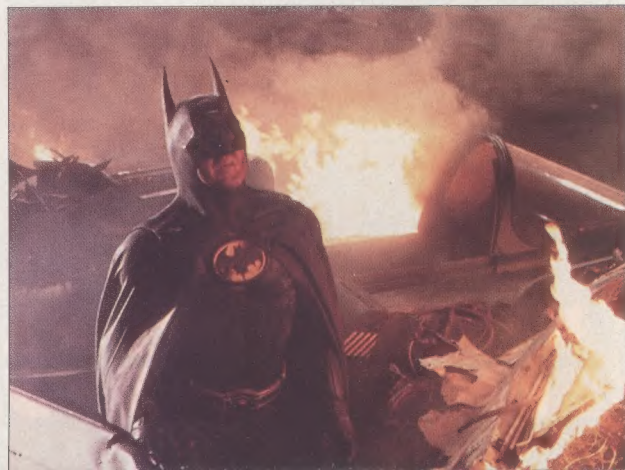
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Now that the digital Compact Disc is a musical triumph, Sony presents the encore.



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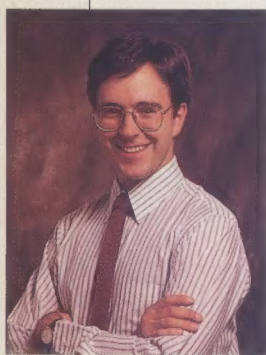
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© Copyright 1989 Sony Corporation of America. All Rights Reserved. Sony and The Leader in Digital Audio are trademarks of Sony. Dolby is a trademark of Dolby Laboratories Licensing Corp. *For those who read footnotes, the D2010 also has audio/video switching, programmable remote control. Sony's low-noise Direct Comparator FM tuning, discrete output transistors and front power output of 130 watts per ch., cont. RMS, both ch. driven into 8 ohms, 20-20,000 Hz, 0.008% THD; rear power output of 15 watts per ch., cont. RMS, both ch. driven into 8 ohms, 20-20,000 Hz, 0.08% THD.
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Ten Years on the Couch

When *Video Review* began publishing nearly 10 years ago, the word "video" was still Greek to most Americans. (Actually, it's Latin, from the word "I see," appropriately enough.) As David Hajdu, one of *VR*'s original editors, recalls in the first installment of our 10th Anniversary series, "Rewind," even people who had VCRs back then didn't know what to call them. Most people called anything with a tape in it a "Betamax," even if the tape in question was VHS.



JAMES B. MEIGS,
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Things have certainly changed. With VCRs in over 65% of American homes, no one has to be told what video means anymore. And, lamentably, there's not much talk about Betamax today. For the past 10 years, *Video Review* has charted these changes. In the next 12 months we will be looking over the distance we've traveled: Hajdu's series will review the milestones in all the important product categories, beginning with the VCR. And our leading critics will make their choices for the finest video releases in every major genre, starting with Neal Gabler's look at comedy this month.

But we will also be looking ahead. Senior editor Gregory Fagan sneaks a peak at the video breakthroughs we expect in the coming year—as well as the coming decade—in his story "Future Perfect," on page 41.

Unfortunately, despite all the progress we've seen, and all we expect to see, one aspect of home video seems to be getting worse: the quality of many prerecorded cassettes. Ever since low-cost prerecorded tapes became a hot item about two years ago, we've been concerned that they don't measure up to even minimum quality standards. Now, a special investigation conducted for *VR* by the Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory has confirmed our worst fears. Before you buy any tapes as last-minute gifts this holiday season, be sure to read our Special Report, "Video's Dirty Secret," starting on page 36.



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It takes a pretty good TV to fool these experts.



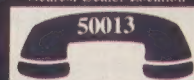
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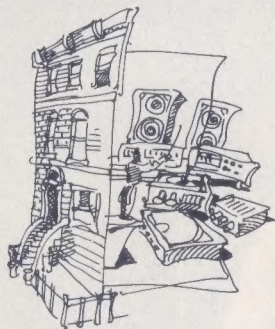
Burial Grouch

So Jim Farber has the audacity to call Stephen King's *Pet Sematary* "idiotic" ("Tape & Disc Reviews," Nov. '89 *VR*)? Can't he tell the difference between good, escapist horror movies and so-called "thinking-person's" movies? I can certainly tell the difference, and I am one of those "thinking persons." How does Jim Farber account for the millions Stephen King has made?

Shelley Coleman
Gardner, IL

Money Talks

The list breakdown for your excellent article, "If I Had a Million Dollars" (Nov. '89



VR), was great, but it did not include a floor plan or specifics for the room or its interior design. For an audio/video setup, would it more closely resemble a theater, a concert hall or what? How about a Part II, including setup, hookup?

Gema Martin
Mesquite, TX

Rather than an article on a millionaire's home video system, why not recommend some middle-class and upper-middle-class video systems?

Isadore Nicholson
San Diego, CA

While the million-dollar system was a great deal of fun—even if you did have to stretch it a bit—why include three 10-grand Nakamichi DAT decks and no less than three Dragons? And what's the use of 10 Chaparral slave receivers if you can't get more than two VideoCipher II units authorized per household without paying cable company rates.

I, too, have a McKay-Dymek AM-5 that's

given me superb service for over 20 years, but as far as I know, McKay-Dymek's been out of business for at least 15 years and no units have been made since. While the AM-5 might belong in that supersystem, would you mind telling me just where you're going to find one? For that matter, where can someone with the bucks buy an ADA IMC-85BA switcher? I could use one, even at that price.

Jack L. Chalker
Westminster, MD

•It may take some hunting, but McKay-Dymek's AM-5 AM tuner occasionally shows up in used audio equipment shops. As for the IMC-85BA switcher, Audio Design Associates (ADA) can be reached at 610 Mamaronek Ave., White Plains, NY 10605, (914) 946-9595. —Ed.

Left to Chances

Reviewer Steve Simels missed the point in his review of *Chances Are* (Nov. '89 *VR*). He finds the celibacy of the two characters played by Cybill Shepherd and Ryan O'Neal unreal. I don't, because I've witnessed it—and similar things—in my own family.

I don't believe in reincarnation, but I found *Chances Are* to be one of the most enjoyable movies I've seen in recent years.

Randy Bemminister
Altoona, WI

Arabian Rights

I cannot agree more with the praises Leonard Maltin bestows on the wonderfully restored *Lawrence of Arabia* ("Tape & Disc Reviews," Nov. '89 *VR*). I am also glad to see him speaking well of letterboxing and hope that more videotapes will be available in this format.

However, I must call attention to your listing the tape's audio as Hi-Fi mono. How can RCA/Columbia get off taking a beautiful, six-channel Dolby soundtrack and giving home viewers a mono videotape? And how can Maltin, if he is a true fan of the movie and an experienced critic, get off not commenting on such a blasphemous reduction in sound content?

Edward D. Carl
Irvine, CA

•Because of an editing error, the review incorrectly listed the movie as mono. For the record, RCA/Columbia's videocassette edi-

tion of *Lawrence of Arabia* is in VHS Hi-Fi stereo and Dolby Surround. —Ed.

Stereo Stagnation

It was with considerable pleasure that I read Ron Goldberg's article "The Great Surround Sound Debate" (Sept. '89 *VR*). Audio has long been viewed as a secondary



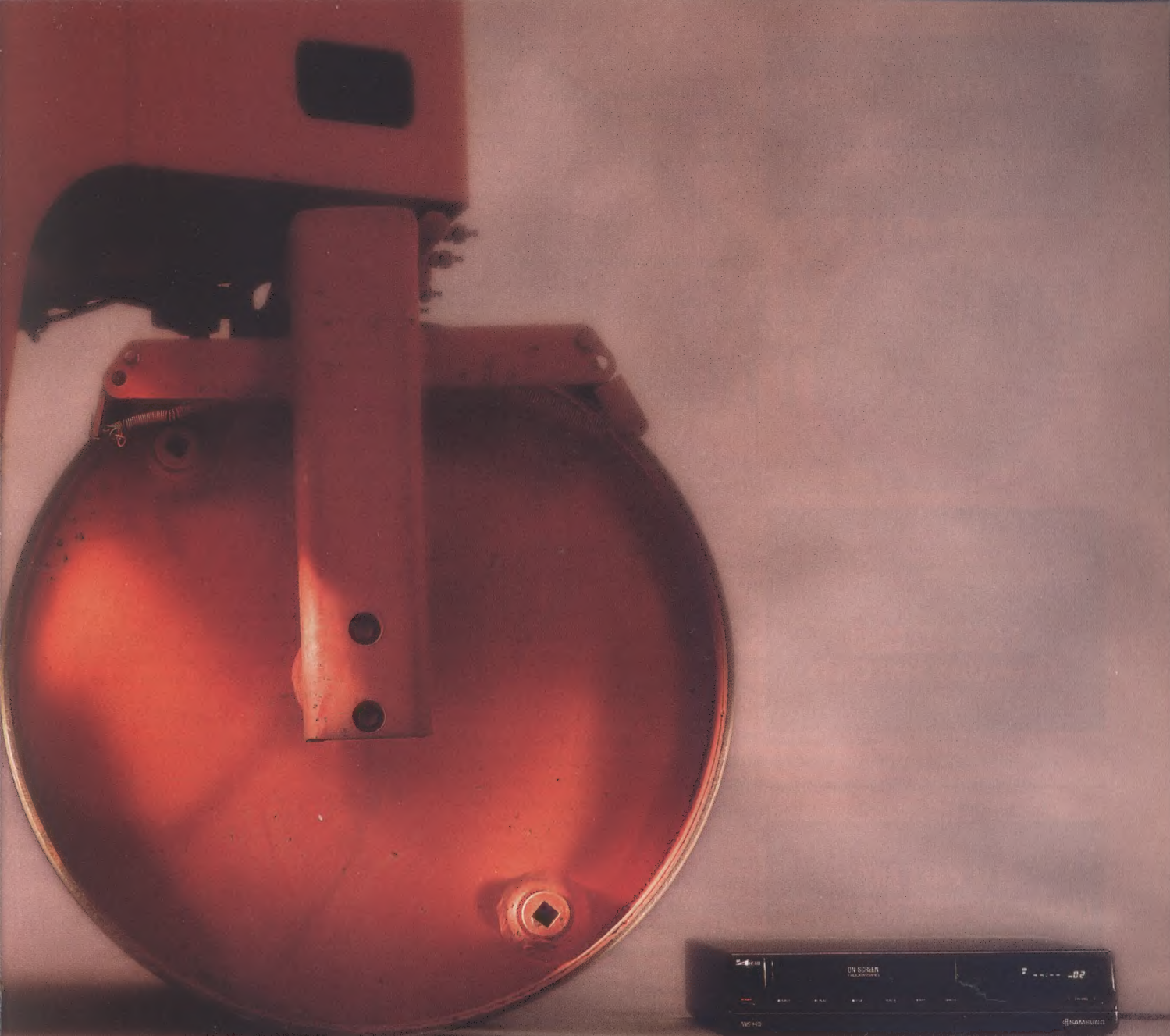
aspect of television and it is to the benefit of all viewers that audio is now being taken seriously by manufacturers. Unfortunately, I'm afraid that a great many broadcasters still have not realized the importance of audio quality. A number of stations still do not have stereo capability, and some do not even broadcast the network feeds in stereo. My solution now is to write to the advertisers. I believe that if enough people complain, advertisers will insist that local stations and networks clean up their acts. After all, their commercials go through the same poor-quality equipment.

J. Carl Cooper
Director of Engineering
Pixel Instruments Corp.
Santa Clara, CA

Super Dub

Everyone is neglecting to tell the entire story of Super VHS. Consumers who don't purchase an S-VHS camcorder or deck because their TV has no special input should be awakened to another plus of the format: quality copies.

Copying an original VHS or S-VHS tape results in a tape with, by my estimate, about 20% fewer horizontal lines of resolution in the SP mode. An S-VHS master (with over 400 lines of resolution) copied onto another S-VHS deck will deliver 300 lines or more,



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for your first-generation dub. That's why an S-VHS camcorder is a necessity for those who dub special events or require high-quality copies of edited tapes.

Paul Dellarte
W. Pittston, PA

New Wiz Won't Wash

I just purchased the 50th Anniversary videotape of *The Wizard of Oz*, and I was



dismayed and disgusted to find a Downy commercial on the tape. The reason I bought the tape was so that I could enjoy the program without commercial interruptions; otherwise, I could just watch the movie on network television. I can't believe that MGM/UA desecrated the movie in this fashion. What relevance does a Downy commercial have to this special release? Does corporate greed know no bounds?

John C. Munson, Jr.
Greenbelt, MD

Primal Screen

I purchased a front-projection TV system with a seven-foot screen for the sole purpose of enjoying movies in a larger-than-life setting. However, because of letterboxing, which drastically reduces picture size, I have decided not to buy letterboxed movies. I like my giant screen to be totally filled with a picture. Letterboxing defeats that purpose.

Plaudits to cable TV premium services for refusing to be influenced by the idiotic, undeserving hype regarding letterboxing.

Ed Dollak
San Francisco, CA

•For an investigation into the controversial subject of letterboxing, check out next month's Video Review. —Ed.

Audio Response

Love your new *Audio Review* section (Nov. '89 VR)! Especially liked the equipment reviews and Stephen A. Booth's "Cutting Edge" article ("Welcome to a New Frequency"). Would you please give me the address for Parsec, though?

Alfred G. Morici
W. Palm Beach, FL

•The antenna-maker's address is Parsec of Delaware, 400 W. Ninth St., Wilmington, DE 19801, (302) 651-9189. —Ed.

Your decision to incorporate a quarterly section on audio components as a bonus feature is highly appreciated. Yet surely, should I need more information on this topic, there are already a number of fine publications on the market, available on a monthly basis. Better for you to devote your energies toward further coverage of video issues. Why not, for example, evaluate the various processors and accessories advertised on your pages. You could also provide greater mention of the merits of minority formats, such as the incomparable ED Beta. Whatever course you do decide to take, however, we as readers would be clearly grateful, for the eminent value of your magazine is to help inform us about video.

Karl W. Braun
Palo Alto, CA

Scouts' Honor

It sure was nice of Steven Spielberg [to co-sponsor a cinematography merit badge] and Panasonic to give the Boy Scouts 50 camcorders ("Newsbreaks," Nov. '89 VR), but don't you think that the Girl Scouts merit some gear as well? Seeing as there are so few



women cinematographers with A.S.C. after their names, I think the girls definitely need some of the same encouragement!

Becky Soto
Jersey City, NJ

Update

The release of Mitsubishi's VS-7002R rear-projection TV, which won a Best Product of the Year Award (Dec. '89 VR), has been postponed due to a potential patent dispute. At presstime, Mitsubishi was considering delivering an alternate 70-inch model by the end of 1989.

Selected correspondence addressed to Video Review, 902 Broadway, New York, NY 10010, is printed in the "Letters" section. VR reserves the right to edit and condense selections for publication. Sorry, no personal replies.

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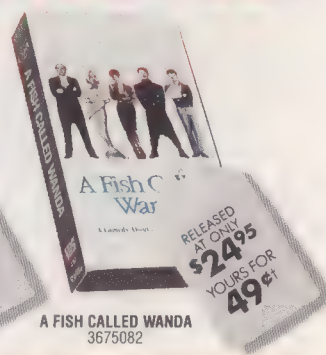
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THE AFRICAN QUEEN	0511362	MOONSTRUCK	2716012			STAKEOUT	5488002	A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 4: DREAM MASTER	5713072
THE GODFATHER PART II	0018592	ON GOLDEN POND	0523572			WUTHERING HEIGHTS	3126452	LITTLE SHOP OF HORRORS (1986)	6297172
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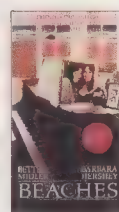
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THE ACCUSED	4418082	JAWS	1000242	HAIRSPRAY	1975092	ROBOCOP	2350022
THREE MEN AND A BABY	5491052	CAN'T BUY ME LOVE	5485032	PEE WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE	6098342		
		TERMS OF ENDEARMENT	2014262	A PASSAGE TO INDIA	1741362		
		THE FLY (1986)	3617332	ANGEL HEART	7956172		
		FIRST BLOOD	6503172	PORKY'S	0775602		
		SPORTS ILLUSTRATED 25TH ANNIV. SWIMSUIT VIDEO	6674022	OUTRAGEOUS FORTUNE	5481072		
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M79/M95/L78

M80/M96/L79



The Time Machine

I'm looking for a version of *The Time Machine* other than the H.G. Wells version or the later remake. I saw it on TV, and I think it starred Donald Sutherland.

Chuck Joseph
Hubbard, OH

Wells wrote the novel *The Time Machine*; so there is no version that is not his. But, there was a movie released in 1979, *Time After Time*, in which Wells (played by Malcolm MacDowell) travels in a time machine of his own invention to chase Jack the Ripper from 19th-century London into 20th-century America. *Time After Time* is available from Warner Home Video for \$29.98 on VHS or Beta and on laser disc for \$24.98. You can special order it through Video Place, 34 N. Main St., Hubbard, OH 44425, (216) 534-0094. For those who want the real thing, the 1960 version of *The Time Machine*, starring Rod Taylor, is distributed by MGM/UA for \$19.95 on VHS or Beta and \$34.95 for the laser disc. Ask for it at a well-stocked retailer, or call MGM/UA at (800) 443-5500 to order the tape by mail (add \$3.50 for postage and handling).

The Rutles

I am looking for the movie *The Rutles*, a Beatles parody with Dan Aykroyd, John Belushi and Bill Murray. I have been told it has been discontinued and I cannot find it anywhere. Can you help?

Charlene Meissner
Millerton, NY

The Rutles also stars Michael Palin and Eric Idle of the British comedy troupe Monty Python. The tape has been withdrawn from distribution by Pacific Arts Video, although it may still be available for rental from stores stocking older tapes. If it's any consolation, Rhino Records has just rereleased the Rutles' album—and the CD features six bonus songs.

The Scarlet Pimpernel

Could you tell me if *The Scarlet Pimpernel* remake starring Anthony Andrews and Jane Seymour was ever put out on video? If so, where can I purchase it?

Dennis Leonard
Warren, OH

Yes, the 1982 made-for-TV version of this romantic tale, set during the French Revolu-

tion, is available on video. The tape, from Vestron Video, is available in VHS and Beta formats, at \$69.98. Try your local dealer first, or call Inovision at (800) 523-5503. Or write them at PO Box 576, Itasca, IL 60143. Add \$4 to cover shipping charges. The original 1935 production, with Leslie Howard and Merle Oberon, is distributed by Nelson Entertainment, for \$19.98. Call Commtron in Solon, OH, at (216) 248-1660 to find a copy.

Rage to Kill

I have been looking for a VHS copy of *Rage to Kill*, starring James Ryan and Oliver Reed. None of the video stores in my area carry it. Can you help?

John Seibert
Raytown, MO

Rage to Kill, an espionage thriller set in the Caribbean, is distributed by A.I.P.



Copter Kill: Reed (right) romps with Rage.

Home Video for \$39.95. You can write the company at 10726 McCune Ave., Los Angeles, CA 90034 or call Debbie Bishop at (800) 456-2471 for ordering info.

The Avengers

I'm looking for anything on *The Avengers*, *CHiPs* and *Scarecrow and Mrs. King*. Thank you very much.

Andrew L. Garrett
Dallas, TX

Television programs that have recently left the major networks and are now in syn-

dication most likely won't be available on video any time soon. Such is the case of *CHiPs* and *Scarecrow*. *The Avengers*, however, is another story altogether. Facets Multimedia, a Chicago-based video-by-mail organization, has nine *Avengers* episodes available for \$19.95 each. You can write for the Facets catalog, which includes episode titles and a brief synopsis of each. The address is Facets Multimedia Inc., 1517 W. Fullerton Ave., Chicago, IL 60614. Phone number: (800) 331-6187. The rights to some 20 other *Avengers* episodes were recently purchased by Weintraub Entertainment, which has withdrawn the shows from distribution. Hopefully, they might be returned to the market soon.

Elvira Madigan

I have tried to locate *Elvira Madigan* on video. I have been informed that it has been discontinued, and have had no luck with distributors. Do you know where I would be able to purchase it?

Margerie Dus
San Diego, CA

Based on a famous Swedish love affair of the 19th century, 1967's *Elvira Madigan* (starring Pia Degermark and Thommy Berggren) chronicles a tightrope walker who falls, so to speak, for an army officer. It is now available for \$79.95 from Crocus Entertainment, (612) 473-9002. For a copy, try your local Tower Video outlet. It is also available for rental—by mail only—from Facets Video, but you have to have a Facets membership to rent it. For membership and rental details as well as its latest catalog, write Facets Video, 1517 W. Fullerton Ave., Chicago, IL 60614, or phone (800) 331-6197.

Jimmy Rodgers

In the 1930s, Jimmy Rodgers recorded and started country and western music. He made one movie, I think, with Columbia Pictures. I'd appreciate any information on where I could obtain a copy of it.

Ed Dees
Magnolia, AR

Let's leave any debate about who began the country sound to another publication, but it would seem the only movies available with Jimmy Rodgers are two of the Hopalong Cassidy westerns of the early 1940s. O

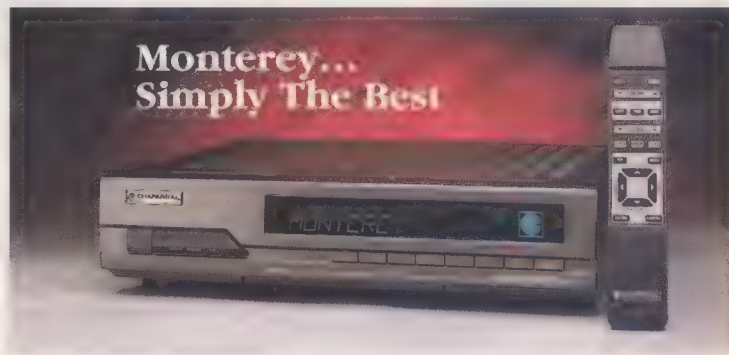
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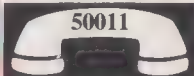
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Enganador (or *False Colors*, 1943) is available from Video Yesteryear, in English with Portuguese subtitles, on VHS, Beta or 8mm videocassette. Call (800) 243-0987 to order by credit card or send \$29.95 (plus \$3 shipping) to Video Yesteryear, Box C, Sandy Hook, CT 06482. *Texas Masquerade* is from Horizon Entertainment Group and can probably be ordered through a local retailer, for \$7.95. If you can't get it that way, write to Peter Allen, Horizon Entertainment, 28231 Avenue Crocker, Suite 120, Valencia, CA 91355. The postpaid price is \$11.45. Any reader who knows of an earlier movie with Jimmy Rodgers available on videotape is requested to write the Video Hunter at the address below and let us know.

Captain Kronos

I am trying to find a copy of the 1974 cult classic *Captain Kronos: Vampire Hunter*. I have tried all local video stores to no avail!

Andy Dursin
Gloucester, RI

Captain Kronos: Vampire Hunter is from Hammer Films, the British production company that gave us so many delightful low-budget horror movies from the late '50s to the mid-'70s. The Captain is a swashbuckler pursuing vampires in Europe, and his movie is distributed by Paramount Home Video on VHS or Beta for \$49.95. Ask your local video retailer to order Paramount catalog # 8484. If you have trouble, you can order it through Tower Video's mail-order service (New York office only) by calling (800) 648-4844.

Hoppity Goes to Town

I'm trying to find a VHS tape of the animated feature *Hoppity Goes to Town*. I saw it when I was a kid and now I'd like my two sons to enjoy it.

Michael Clark
El Cajon, CA

Hoppity Goes to Town, from 1941, is the story of a grasshopper who saves Bugville from doom when a skyscraper is to be built on the little insect community. It is from Max Fleischer, who gave us Betty Boop, among other classic cartoon characters. At this writing, *Hoppity Goes to Town* is available, on VHS only, from Publisher's Central Bureau, for \$14.95 plus \$4.50 shipping and handling and California sales tax. PCB is a mail-order company dealing in leftovers, overstock and classic movies as well as books, and its stock changes quickly. You can write Publisher's Central Bureau, One Champion Ave., Dept. 491, Avenel, NJ 07001-2301. To place a credit-card order, call (800) 722-9800, ext. 491. It is also available from Facets Video in Chicago.

Detour

I am very anxious to see *Detour*, the film noir with Ann Savage. Could you tell me where I may locate a copy for purchase or rental?

V.L. O'Farrell
Sacramento, CA

Some might be anxious while seeing 1945's *Detour*, about a young hitchhiker who finds himself involved with a woman of dubious scruples and her questionable death. To each his own. *Detour* is available for \$24.95, plus shipping and handling, from Video Yesteryear, Box C, Sandy Hook, CT 06482, (800) 243-0987.

Shame

I am looking for the video *Shame*, an Australian movie out some time ago, but video stores near me don't have it. They look at me like I'm an alien and offer me *Shane* instead.

Claudia Rubin
Carmel, CA

Australia may be the land down under, but it certainly is not another planet. Shame on any retailer who alienates a customer that way. But, let's get this straight: *Shane* (US, 1952), with Alan Ladd as a retired gun-fighter, is available on VHS, Beta, and laser disc from Paramount Home Video. *Shame* (Australia, 1988), the story of a lady lawyer stranded in a small town with a secret, is \$89.95 from Republic Pictures Home Video, and you should be able to find a copy at any Tower Video outlet in northern California.

Windjammer

I am trying to locate two movies, *Windjammer* and *The Girl Can't Help It*. Can you help me?

Ralph Kuhn
Mableton, GA

Windjammer, a 1937 programmer with George O'Brien, about the survivors of a shipwrecked yacht who are saved by a gunrunner, is available from Victory Video, Earl Blair Enterprises, P.O. Box 87, Toney, AL 35773, (205) 852-0198. 1956's *The Girl Can't Help It*, with Jayne Mansfield, is available from Key Video for \$59.98 and can be ordered through your local retailer. It is also available by mail for the same price from Facets Video (see address above).

As a service to our readers, Video Review will help track down hard-to-find tapes or discs. Send requests to Video Review's Video Hunter, 902 Broadway, New York, NY 10010. VR reserves the right to edit and condense selections for publication. Sorry, no personal replies.



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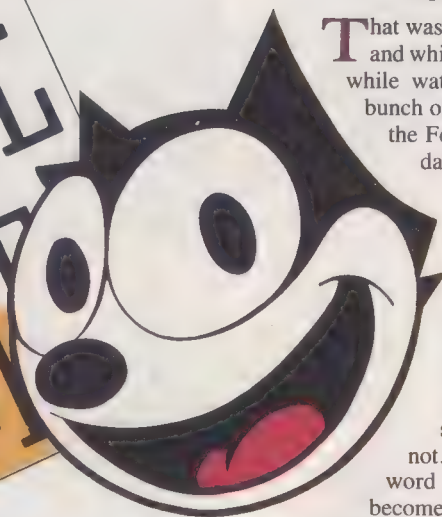
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YOUR HEART WILL GO PITTER-PAT

That was the promise of the *Felix the Cat* theme song, and while we never experienced any such palpitations while watching those cartoons, we're glad to see a bunch of them being released by VidAmerica. While the Felix character himself dates back to the early days of the century (he was introduced in 1914), the cartoons on the four new videocassettes are from Felix's TV incarnation of the '50s and '60s. And what a strange universe the jolly, perverse feline inhabits in these animated episodes. With rationalist, scientific antagonists like the Professor and the Master Cylinder helpless against Felix's magic Bag o' Tricks, the whole series can be interpreted as a tract favoring intuition and spontaneity over cold logic. Then again, maybe not. One thing is certain: The show added the word "Poindexter"—an appellation that was to become the bane of many a bespectacled adolescent's existence—to our lexicon. The VidAmerica releases include an hour-long compilation (\$14.98) and three individual episodes (a mere \$6.98 apiece).

QUOTE/UNQUOTE

"We've agreed that we'll burn in Hell if we call [the movie] *Ghostbusters II*."

Hey, we didn't say it—Bill Murray himself said it, last year, during an interview promoting *Scrooged*. Pretty insistent he was, too, adding, "I suggested *The Last of the Ghostbusters* just so we wouldn't have anything like a *Ghostbusters III*." Given the not-to-be-named-*Ghostbusters* Under-any-circumstances se-

quel's mildly disappointing boxoffice figures (thanks to *Batman*), Murray may not have to worry about that. (Although if the RCA/Columbia home release of *Ghostbusters II* does well, the cast may be called back for a made-for-video followup. Yeah right.)

What he does have to worry about is his eternal damnation—

and that of his collaborators. Well, Bill, try to keep a cool head down there, and if it's any consolation, we're sure that Dan Aykroyd will wind up a few circles lower than you, solely on account of *My Stepmother Is an Alien*.



TV TAKES TO THE SKIES

Some airlines are mean—they won't let you play with your toys while flying. As has been detailed in the "Letters" column of this magazine (Oct. '89 VR), a number of respectable professionals have been subjected to awful humiliation at the hands of shrill flight attendants just for watching a mini-TV/VCR on a plane.

Other airlines are nice. They give you toys to play with. Virgin Atlantic Airways has put a nifty Video Age feature in its Upper Class ticket package, offering Sony's GV-8 Video Walkman and a movie menu of over 100 titles as part of its service to London. Virgin Atlantic's executive vice president David Tate reports that the advertised offer has been a surprisingly big hit. "You offer people things like fine wine, limousine service, free rental car, two nights in a hotel, and they're kind of ho-hum about it," Tate says. "But give them a choice of over 100 in-flight movies and they get really excited."

What Are You Watching?



BARRY GIBB

Who needs disco when you've got—what *have* the Bee Gees got, anyway? Well, back in the Top 40 with a big concert tour in tow, the brothers Gibb are stayin' alive, and hirsute Bee Barry says video has played a part in their inexplicable comeback. A tennis nut and semipro player, Barry watches matches on prerecorded cassettes, and time-shifts games he can't see firsthand.

"In a good tennis game, even on TV, you can see the same success strategy that we have in music. You play as creatively as you can, you persevere, and occasionally you win," avers the most-macho Gibb.

What about the group's own video legacy, including the 1978 megaflop *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*? "My kids like it," says Barry, with a beautifully executed, back-handed compliment.

GOODNESS GRACIOUS

At a press junket to promote *Great Balls of Fire* (Orion), the peppy, bigger- (not to mention prettier-) than-life depiction of Jerry Lee Lewis' courtship of and marriage to his (gulp) 13-year-old cousin, the real-life Killer himself deigned to make an appearance. His exchanges with the assembled reporters were memorable indeed.

When asked if all the scary rumors about him were true, he batted not an eyelash, instead allowing that the press had gotten things "about 90% right." This cast something of a pall over things; several people in the room no doubt remembered a *Rolling Stone* article from a few years back on the mysterious circumstances surrounding the demise of one of Lewis' wives. Still, reporters being reporters, they pressed on. One asked Lewis if being involved with a movie about his life held any "psychiatric" value for him.

Steely-eyed, Lewis insisted he didn't know what the word "psychiatric" meant.

The reporter, not realizing that was a cue to drop the subject, charged again, this time changing the word to "therapeutic."

Lewis, from all indications not a devotee of the "It Pays to Enrich Your Word Power" department in *The Reader's Digest*, evinced similar ignorance of that word.

Finally, the reporter asked Lewis if the experience had helped him get anything off his chest.

The Killer tapped his pipe on his knee, leaned in the direction of his questioner, stared him down and drawled, "Well sir, I don't think you can ever really get *anything* off your chest. Do you?"

End of discussion.



TECHNOLOGY AT ITS MOST ADORABLE

Perusing a recent issue of *Dempa Digest*, a newsletter summarizing all the latest consumer electronics news from Japan, we came across an item that left us grinning. The newest Sanyo/Fisher camcorders in Japan feature autofocus systems with "fuzzy logic" ("Newsbreaks," Dec. '89 VR). At first we thought the "fuzzy" business was a typo, but it occurred again later in the item. "Gosh," we thought, "How cute! 'Fuzzy logic'—why, next we'll be seeing monitor/receivers with cuddly color correction, or even VCRs with floppy ears!"

Then, however, we decided to get serious about the whole thing and find out just *what* the heck "fuzzy logic" was. First we called Sanyo/Fisher's American headquarters, but the representatives we talked to were refreshingly innocent of any knowledge of the term. We weren't terribly surprised, since American executives are often the last to know what their Japanese counterparts are up to.

We then decided to walk to the other side of the office and consult our in-house Consumer Electronics Guru. "What's fuzzy logic?" we asked. "Faulty thinking" was his original, uproarious reply. Then he explained. Fuzzy logic, it turns out, stands in opposition to digital logic, which computes elements according to fixed positions—one or two. Fuzzy logic is theoretically better because it can fix on positions between those digitally decided points. Mathematically inclined readers can discern the difference by plotting a curve digitally and then drawing its analog equivalent. And the rest of us can wisely recall the time (mere moments ago) when we thought "fuzzy logic" was something cute. As for the camcorders utilizing it, well, we'll keep you posted.

HIT LIST

LAST MONTH	TOP TAPES	THIS MONTH	TOP DISCS	LAST MONTH
—	BATMAN Warner—\$24.98	1	GONE WITH THE WIND MGM/UA LV—\$49.95	—
—	GHOSTBUSTERS II RCA/Columbia—\$89.95	2	THE WIZARD OF OZ MGM/UA LV—\$24.98	2
1	WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT Touchstone—\$19.99	3	LAWRENCE OF ARABIA RCA/Columbia LV—\$49.95	—
2	BAMBI Walt Disney—\$26.99	4	THE LAND BEFORE TIME MCA CLV—\$24.98; CAV—\$49.98	3
—	SCROOGED Paramount—no list price	5	RAIN MAN MGM/UA LV—\$29.98	1
3	WORKING GIRL CBS/Fox—\$89.98	6	THE MAKING OF A LEGEND: GONE WITH THE WIND MGM/UA LV—\$39.95	—
4	RAIN MAN MGM/UA—\$89.98	7	THE NAKED GUN Paramount LV—\$24.50	9
5	THE LAND BEFORE TIME MCA—\$24.95	8	BEACHES Touchstone LV—\$39.99	—
—	ERNEST SAVES CHRISTMAS Touchstone—\$89.95	9	TWINS MCA LV—\$34.98	8
—	SCANDAL HBO—\$89.95	10	THE MALTESE FALCON MGM/UA LV—\$34.95	—

"Hit List" is based on a nationwide survey of leading video software specialty stores, chains, mass merchandisers and wholesalers. The list includes titles taken from retailers' current top tape and disc lists as well as distributors' prerelease sales printouts.



Freeze That Frame

From our readers: a guide to the movies' most memorable goofs, gaffes and other "remote" secrets

Travels to Other Galaxies and Keeps on Ticking:

Gary L. Lovelace of Poplar Bluff, Missouri, obviously keeps a close watch on his movies. "In an early sequence from 1978's *Superman* (Warner)," he writes, "the setting is Krypton, a highly developed and futuristic world located in the farthest reaches of the cosmos. Marlon Brando is about to place the infant Man of Steel into a ship for his journey to Earth. As Brando leans forward to set the child in the cockpit, his left sleeve slides upward to reveal a very Earth-like Rolex wristwatch. From what I could tell it was a quarter of 12."

A New Kind of Video Transfer(ence): "Watching scenes in slow-motion or frame-advance often reveals subtle, almost subliminal touches that directors add to their works," writes Paul P. Kelley of Ithaca, New York. "The werewolf saga *The Howling* (Nelson) overflows

with such touches, one of which can be seen only in freeze-frame. The setup is at the beginning of

the movie, where the reporter (Dee Wallace) meets a contact in a peep-show booth. There, she discovers that her contact is a werewolf. The movie running in the booth during this scene features a blonde woman being tied and gagged, and it becomes linked in Wallace's mind with the horror of seeing a man change into a wolf. Later in the movie Wallace has flashbacks where the face of the struggling girl from the movie-within-a-movie is intercut with surreal images of a wolf. But in the second flashback scene, the face she sees is not that of the actress, but her own. The image lasts

only a few frames and is seen to best advantage using the frame advance feature of a VCR."



That Excalibur shine.

Royal Foul-Up: "Two-thirds of the way through *Excalibur* (Warner), there's a close-up that opens on Merlin's (Nicol Williamson) shiny helmet. Dollying back, the shot reveals the perfect black shadow of the cameraman," notes Theresa

Tierney of Missoula, Montana.

Our Entire Crew Wishes You and Yours a Happy Holiday Season... Almost everyone who's written to this column has cited blunders from 1951's *A Christmas Carol* starring Alastair Sim (United). "When Sim (as Scrooge) wakes up 'the morning after' as a changed man, he goes and looks in the mirror,"

writes Philip Cavallo of Chicago, Illinois. "In that mirror is the reflection of a seated man; this occurs twice in the space of a few seconds." Lisa J. Goodrich of Hendersonville, Tennessee, continues the tale: "When the redeemed Scrooge is dancing around with his maid, you can see what looks like the whole camera crew reflected in the mirror near the wall."



A Christmas reflection.

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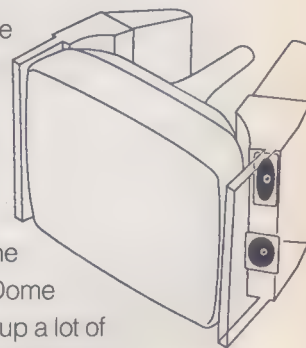
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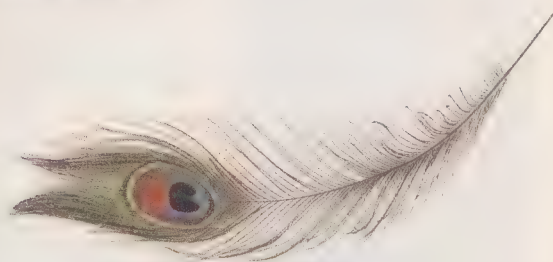


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NEWSBREAKS

LOCAL ADS ON TAPE... TAPE STUDY...

HDTV CONTRACTS... VIDEO LAWSUITS...

F.Y.I.

U.S. TV's JAPAN BOUND

PHILIPS CONSUMER
Electronics has become the first company to export US-manufactured television sets to Japan. At presstime, the Dutch-owned company expected to ship around 1,500 27-inch tabletop sets, designed to meet Japanese consumer standards, by the end of 1989, with many more projected for the '90s.

DISCS HAVE NEW HOME

JAPAN'S PIONEER
Electronics, the world's largest manufacturer of videodiscs and players, has agreed to buy DiscoVision Associates from the venture's partners, IBM and MCA, for \$200 million. DiscoVision, founded by MCA, developed the first optical videodisc system and was the first to turn out videodiscs. Over the last 10 years DiscoVision sold its disc manufacturing interests to Pioneer, and has restricted its business to selling its patented video and audio laser disc technology.

WNET GOES SAP

NEW YORK PUBLIC
television station WNET/Thirteen has debuted Thirteen FM, a separate audio program (SAP) channel that will offer narration for and simultaneous language translation of certain programs. To hear the SAP signal, viewers will need a TV or VCR with an MTS decoder.

HIGH-DEF JAM

BUZZ, A NEW 30-MINUTE MTV program dedicated to pop culture, is the first TV show to regularly incorporate high-definition TV. Manhattan's Rebo Studios is producing the HDTV portions.

TAPE ADS VICTORIOUS

VIDEO BROADCASTING
Systems—under fire from Paramount Home Video for splicing local ads on the blank tape preceding certain Paramount titles—may be teaming up with another local commercial-splicing company to take their business nationally. A US District Court recently ruled that Video Broadcasting's actions did not violate copyright laws. At presstime, Paramount, which sought an injunction and \$1 million in damages, was expected to appeal.

CHEAPER HIT MOVIES

HONEY, I SHRUNK THE PRICE

By John R. Quain

Consumers should start seeing lower prices on the video releases of hit movies early this year. Typically, boxoffice smashes first arrive in video stores at prices up to \$90, although some "A" titles—including *E.T.*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and *Batman*—have been released for as low as \$22.99. Beginning this year, however, a slew of top-grossing movies from last summer are expected to hit video store shelves at under \$30.

At presstime, Disney Home Video had announced that it would release *Honey, I Shrunk the Kids* in March at a below-\$30 budget price. Paramount Home Video was also making plans to distribute *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* at a low retail price,



The Lethal Weapon cops are back—with a lower suggested retail.

as was Warner Home Video for its release of *Lethal Weapon 2*.

The prevailing wisdom among video distributors has been to release new video titles at \$89.95, with the expectation that more consumers will rent rather than buy.

However, Disney's announcement and the incredible success of movies such as *Batman*, which at presstime had racked up estimated sales of 15 million cassettes (at a \$24.98 list price), may have started a trend.

SURVEY RESULTS

Home Taping Okay, Says Study

By Robert Gerson

The economic loss to video software companies from in-home taping of prerecorded material is far outweighed by the benefits to society in general, says the Office of Technology Assessment (OTA) in its report to Congress on a study launched two years ago. If accepted at face value on Capitol Hill, the report should put an end to legislative attempts to impose royalty taxes on VCRs, audiocassette recorders and blank tape. The report could also mean rough sledding for the coming recording-industry push for legislation restricting the copy

capabilities of digital audiotape (DAT) recorders.

The most dramatic results of the study of 1,500 tapers: 81% of all audio taping of selections, and 64% of complete album copies, are made from recordings owned by the taper or a family member; tapers are the biggest customers for albums; if it were not possible to make copies at home, at least 75% of homemade tapes would not be replaced by sales of prerecorded music. That, the study indicates, is because the main reasons for home audio taping are customizing tapes, preservation of albums, increased playing time and getting quality bet-

ter than prerecorded tapes.

As for complaints that home taping means lost sales, the study says only about 13% of recent music tapings by adults were made from borrowed recordings, and that "taping for other people is a marginal activity." Only 6% said they made a dupe to avoid buying a commercial recording, and, the study states, the availability of dual-deck recorders seems to have no effect on recording habits.

By way of shooting down a tape tax, the study says that 73% of recent audio recordings are of such non-commercial material as voices, live home musical perform-

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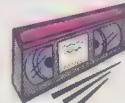
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ances and telephone answering machine messages. Only 28% of those queried had taped any music at all from prerecorded material.

The report estimates consumers make between 578 million and 600 million audio copies a year, and buy between 750 million and 885 million commercial recordings. So, it concludes, to

bar home taping "would result in a large net loss to society."

A separate section of the survey dealing with VCRs shows, as expected, that most taping is done off the air for time-shift purposes, and that, unlike audio dupes, video copies are generally recorded over once the material has been viewed.

HIGH-DEF R&D

Projectavision Wins HDTV Funds

The first of \$50 million in contracts to fund high-definition television related research in the US was awarded by the Defense Department's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) to Projectavision, a one-year-old Westbury, New York, company. Projectavision will receive \$1 million in support of its work on a liquid crystal display projection TV system.

The next group of DARPA

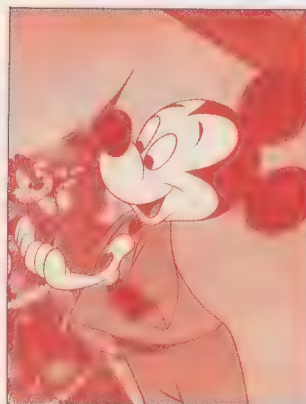
contracts, with amounts not yet set, will be awarded to companies developing signal processing technology. The David Sarnoff Research Labs of Princeton, New Jersey, in conjunction with Sun Microsystems and Texas Instruments, will be working on processor design and integrated circuits. Adams Russell Electronics of Waltham, Massachusetts, in cooperation with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, will work on signal compression technology to reduce the radio spectrum bandwidth necessary for HDTV transmission. Working on a similar product for digital communications will be San Diego's Qualicom, Inc. (R.G.)

JACKSON, DISNEY SUITS

The Gloved One to Bootleggers: Beat It

By Doug Brod

Pop star Michael Jackson has successfully defended his ownership of the Beatles song catalog by recently winning a lawsuit against a video company that was distributing four bootleg videocassettes of the group (see



Disney slips Amvest a Mickey.

"Newsbreaks," May 1989 V/R). In the suit—which was also initiated by the Beatles company Apple Corps—Jackson charged that Neptune, New Jersey's Video Wholesalers and its head, David Saka, infringed on copyrights with their tapes of *The Magical Mystery Tour* and three Beatles concerts. The New Jersey Federal Court awarded Jackson \$130,000 and a permanent injunction.

In an unrelated case, the Walt Disney Co. has taken to court a company it says has been releasing tapes featuring the unauthorized use of Disney characters. Disney has hit Rahway, New Jersey's Amvest Video Corp. with a suit charging the company with copyright and trademark infringement. In addition to at least \$17 million in damages, Disney is seeking an injunction to halt the sale of the cassettes.

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Citizen's \$130 P422 has a 2½-inch color LCD screen and can operate on



four AA batteries for up to four hours, according to the company. The P422 can also be hooked into a car battery or AC adapter. Connections include an earphone jack and AV input.

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—John R. Quain

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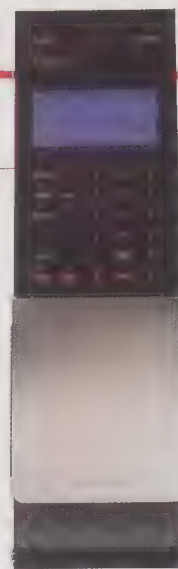
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THE MAN WHO VIEWED TOO MUCH

A noted television critic explains how he learned to stop worrying and love video

BY MARVIN KITMAN

They used to say that I had one of the finest minds in Western civilization. Then, as luck would have it, I became a TV critic. Until *Newsday* hired me, I hadn't watched any television; this makes me the only person I know who has never sat in front of the tube without getting paid for it. When it happened, my friends in the literary establishment said my brain would turn to mush. But I showed them. . . .

It's true that I began to read less. (I have been reading *War and Peace* for approximately 13 years now. But only during commercials.) I guess you could say I'm virtually illiterate today. The delearning curve has been remarkable. But I have evolved to an even higher state of development. Without mean-

ing to be boastful, I can state that I am now beyond literacy. I have become a true audio/video person. It might even be said that I *am* a VCR (in point of fact, the name of my autobiography is *I Am a VCR*). I am the person Christopher Isherwood might have been anticipating when he wrote *I Am a Camera*.

I don't want to alarm anybody, but have you ever considered that we all might be mutating, to quote Willard Scott, "even as we speak," from all the video viewing we do? Biologically, even—I know that my own kidneys are not the same anymore. I

can no longer sit and watch an entire movie without commercials. Even watching a potentially uninterrupted videocassette, the pause button on the remote calls like a siren. And as our kidneys have shrunk, our stomachs have grown. How else can you explain the constant need to nosh? Our next development may be bigger eyeballs (the size of cantaloupes, noted TV-hater

Fred Allen used to predict, to go with brains the size of peas. And then smaller ears like corn kernels, although home surround sound might counteract that). But I'm not an authority on science; heck, I used to think a chromosome was a new Zenith picture tube. Still, who is to say that we're not all in the process of becoming VCRs?

I know I started metamorphosing 10 years ago when I got my first deck. Before video, my job as a TV critic had me watching two or three stations at once. I did it because I had heard that was the way Jack Gould of *The New York Times*, the founding father of TV criticism, used to do it. And look what happened to him. I knew something had gone awry when he kept saying that the trouble with the networks was that they didn't run more opera in primetime.

Furthermore, in all the legendary network executives' offices I visited, trying to find out what was wrong with TV (Marvin Antonowsky of NBC, Bud Grant of CBS, Barry Diller of ABC)—they always had three sets going on at once as well. And maybe *that* was what was wrong with TV.

As for myself, I never really liked watching multiple sets, for a very technical reason: It gave me a headache.

So my VCR changed my life. I could now watch one program, say, *Hello, Larry* with McLean Stevenson, while recording the incredible *That's Incredible!* on ABC. Instead of getting a headache, my mind just constantly reeled.

In the dark years before video, watching television was a passive occupation. These were the days long before the discovery of the couch potato. I was a couch zucchini then. Video changed me. Before video, I was a non-participant with tired blood, a schlep, the dregs, the pits. Video changed me into a Mediaman! The advent of video made me the equal of a network vice president in charge of programming. Ten years ago I started recording and watching to suit my needs, not to satisfy

Marvin Kitman is the television critic of *Newsday*. His column, "The Marvin Kitman Show," is syndicated nationally by the Los Angeles Times Syndicate. He is also the author of *I Am a VCR* (Random House) and *The Making of the President 1789* (Harper & Row).

an advertiser's marketing demands or solve some network's silly ratings problem.

Power! What video is all about—controlling what gets on!

My VCR taught me how to thwart the evil empire, the E.T.s on the planet of L.A. When they did their stupid pet tricks during sweeps months, like airing *The Wizard of Oz*, *Elvis: Alive and Well in New Jersey* and mud-wrestling championships all at the same time, I could laugh.

With video, everyone became their own Freddy Silverman or Brandon Tartikoff. And why not? We have better taste than those guys. To hell with the Nielsen ratings. We have the Murphy or Cohen or Kitman ratings, which guarantee seeing what we want when we want it.

Video freed me from the tyranny of crummy corporate decisions. Why did I have to watch 32 hours of *War and Remembrance* on seven consecutive days? That's inhumane treatment, violating the Geneva Accords on Videocide. My VCR let me go to either extreme: I could watch all 32 hours consecutively, non-stop except for when those mutated kidneys called. Or I could spread the show over a summer vacation, when there was nothing more interesting to do than the dishes.

This sense of freedom is a commonplace now, but 10 years ago, when I got my first VCR, the experience was mind-blowing. I felt like a kid with his first death-ray gun, and I immediately began to experiment.

One of my earliest experiments was in commercial zapping. But soon I noticed I was missing some of the best stuff on TV. I was really out of it at literary cocktail parties, where the commercials were more widely discussed than the latest books. (I've long felt that newspapers are mistaken in listing scheduled TV programs, which are well known. They should list commercials so we'd all know when the favorites that everybody talks about are on.) Then I began recording without sound. You'd be amazed how interesting some of those dramas are without the dialogue. You don't know what's going on, which can be a big help. Then I started zapping the picture. But that was radio. Lately, I'm often inclined to eliminate both.

My VCR helped me out of many socially embarrassing situations. Back in the early '80s, I'd be at Elaine's on a Friday night with all the other literary lights (except for Woody Allen), and around nine o'clock I would get antsy. I couldn't tell my companions that I just had to see *Dallas*. "I'm not hooked or anything," I'd say to myself, "I just want to know what happened." (That's probably why Woody Allen was never there; he was at home, watching.) My VCR lifted that anxiety off my shoulders, and solved similar problems relating to Thursday nights (*Knots Landing*) and Wednesday nights (*Dynasty*). No one had to know—with video, I could tape them all and watch them in the privacy of my bedroom. With the VCR,

primetime soaps became the New Porno for intellectuals.

In all my years reviewing TV shows, I always had a strange talent for knowing which shows would be canceled. It could be boiled down to a pretty simple formula: Anything I liked would get the ax. I had a higher percentage of accuracy than Nostradamus, not to mention Jimmy the Greek. But still being able to air episodes of shows like the late *St. Elsewhere* to this day makes me feel like Zeus, the god of hot air.

I've also been taping whole series in one night—witness the *Monty Python* and *Fawlty Towers* marathons Public Television stations air periodically. A wonderful public service, if counterproductive—after taping their Britcoms, one can just turn off their incessant pledge drives.

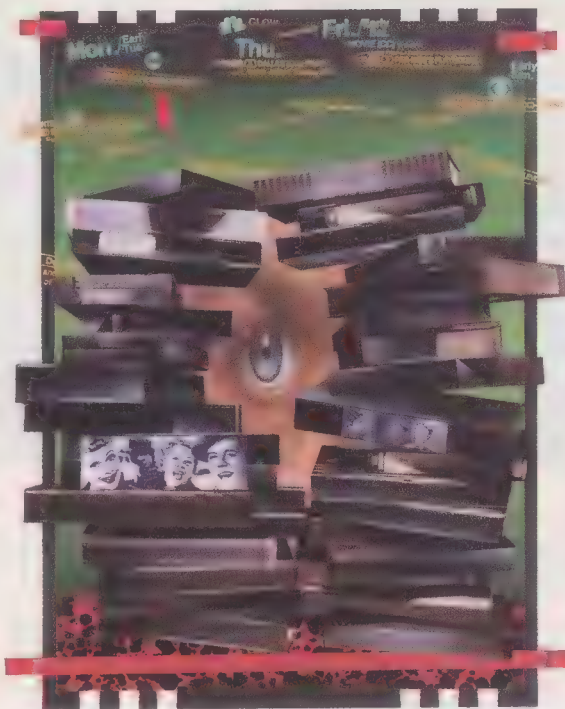
Lately, cable channels like Nick at Nite have played a larger role in my scholarly studies of the TV medium. I'm close to a full collection of *Car 54, Where Are You?* episodes, and my

VCR is on a steady diet of *SCTV* and *The Best of Saturday Night Live* installments. All I need for my collection now is *My Little Margie*, the first sitcom about a speed freak.

Not that you should conclude from the above that I'm just another highbrow video aesthete. My collection also includes a particularly piquant episode of *G.L.O.W.* (Gorgeous Ladies of Wrestling), which, as you scholars know, is a bit short on wrestling but makes up for it with lots of scanty costumes, kinky sexual innuendoes and humor that makes *Hee Haw* seem like...well, humor. My most treasured episode features the Heavy Metal Sisters, Spike and Chainsaw, humiliating the Southern Belles (would you believe they're named Tara and Scarlett?) by dousing them in Southern Comfort and making one of them bark like a dog and jump through a flaming hoop. I don't think that even the Museum of Broadcasting has that one.

The *G.L.O.W.* episode proudly stands on my shelf alongside the first kiss between beast Vincent and beauty Catherine, J.R. getting shot, Jaclyn Smith as Florence Nightingale in the Crimea, Dan Rather's tennis-match-inspired walk-off from the *CBS Evening News*, the *Fernwood 2-Nite* episode with Martin Mull interviewing the high-school science teacher who spanked Debbie the cheerleader, and other great moments in video history. The invention of the VCR, as McLuhan I believe said, has made the railroad Pullman obsolete. I never knew what that meant, but I've always wanted to throw it into one of my serious historical articles. The real point is that every home that has a VCR is already a potential broadcast museum, a valuable working archive in the history of mankind and TVkind.

In the next 10 years I'll become a better media manipulator, I'm sure, catching more and more of the things I want to treasure on video. The only problem is that just as I once had (and still have) many unread books, magazines and scholarly journals taking up space, waiting for me to get around to them, now I have dozens of recorded videotapes I don't have time to watch. That's what I call a well-rounded individual. □





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THE VCR

*How the Machine That Started It All
Went from Novelty to Necessity*

BY DAVID HAJDU

At first, nobody even knew what to call them. "VTRs"—for videotape recorders—was the term usually used by the earliest videophiles, whom nobody knew what to call, either. The few newspaper items published about home video recorders at the time tried "television recorders," "TV tapers," "home videoplayers" and all sorts of other awkward mumbo. A lot of early owners called their equipment "Betamaxes," regardless of its format, as in "I just got a VHS Betamax."

It was 1976, and the first home videocassette recorder, or whatever-you-call-it, had just been introduced. But the Video Decade was still virtually inconceivable. After all, from the earliest patent for a video recording device in 1927, home video technology had always had as many problems as it had promise. It was 1956 when RCA first announced development of the "See-Hear" home video system, which was never seen nor heard of again. It was 1963 when Telcan had a press demonstration of its home recorder, demonstrating that Telcoudn't. It was 1967 when *Tape Recording* magazine asked, in its cover story about black-and-white reel-to-reel decks, "Are You Ready for Home VTR?" The answer was evidently "Nope."

Few of the recent news stories about the success of the VCR have noted the technology's astoundingly slow and shaky start.

From 1976 to 1979, VCR sales were an enormous disappointment. At the time, Robert Gerson, a longtime video-industry authority and VR contributor from the first issue, reported that VCR sales of 475,000 were "far below the original projections" of one million recorders for 1979.

Part of the problem was technological confusion. Confusion? Chaos. By the time *Video Review* made its debut in April 1980, five incompatible VCR formats were available for sale in America: Beta I, Beta II, VHS, the Sanyo V-Cord II and the Quasar VX-2000. Nobody knew which format or formats would survive, and nobody—including manufacturers—could seem to decide which format to use. Some companies announced allegiance to one system, then suddenly switched. Others hyped promising formats such as LVR that were never introduced.

The other big problem was the pure vacuum of public knowledge of and demand for VCRs. According to Sony, every \$1,300 Betamax sold during the product's first year on the market cost the company \$500 in advertising and promotion. In preparation for the launch of *Video Review*, we commissioned our own study of consumer attitudes toward home video, and it showed, essentially, that nobody understood the questions. These findings convinced us to proceed; people obviously needed our help.

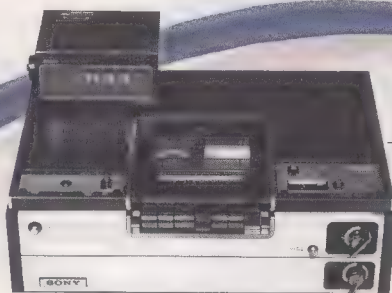


REVIEW

Jan. 1927
British patent
filed for "elec-
tromagnetic
image and
sound record-
ing and play-
back device."
Inventor: Boris
Ritchouloff,
Russian.

Illustration: Michael Okamoto

FAST SCAN



Oct. 1975
First Betamax,
a TV/VCR con-
sole, bows in
US— \$2,295,
one-hour re-
cording capa-
bility.

Feb. 1976
Betamax deck
unveiled—45
pounds,
\$1,300.

The first half of the Video Decade was shaped by the format war between Beta and VHS, the two major formats of VCRs, as they were collectively called by then. At first, with VCR ownership split just about evenly, both camps assumed that both formats could coexist indefinitely, like gas and electric ranges. As Sony chairman Akio Morita said in the July 1980 issue of *VR*, "Even though the Beta and VHS systems are incompatible, I feel that the VCR market is likely to be big enough for both of them."

Cocktail-party jokes and cartoons played the battle of the VCR formats for laughs. (Young woman tells her boyfriend, "It'll never work out between us. I'm Beta, and you're VHS.") In the field, though, this technological war was tough. Each of the two formats took the offensive with new developments intended to give it a competitive advantage. It was this intensive competition between Beta and VHS that stimulated development of wireless remotes and stereo in 1980, under-\$500 decks in 1982 and Hi-Fi sound in 1983. By 1985, the clear victors were (1) VHS and (2) all owners of VCRs in both formats, who picked up all the technological booty.

Another even rougher clash over VCRs was kicking up in the courts at the beginning of the decade. In 1981, the Ninth Circuit District Court of Appeals reversed a 1979 ruling that had established the legality of home taping, in response to a lawsuit by Disney and Universal Pictures against Sony and others. Hollywood and the VCR community escalated their legal warfare with a campaign of appeals, counterappeals and public blood-boiling. And the public was left with no idea if their increasingly popular pastime was legal or against the law.

Early VCR ads and promotional material used to include warnings specifying that the equipment was not to be used for copyright infringement, despite the fact that no one knew exactly what sort of recording qualified as copyright infringement. Millions of VCR owners lived with the fear (or the thrill) that they were breaking the law. Some were afraid they could be thrown in the hoosegow for taping *Charlie's Angels* and, come

to think of it, that might have been appropriate treatment.

At one stage in 1982, Congress stepped in and set up a hearing to explore possible legislative responses to the VCR debate. On the anti-taping side, Hollywood brought out Clint Eastwood to testify. He wore sunglasses on the stand. On the pro-taping side, I was there to testify, and I probably made his day. Somehow, still, video fans were soon vindicated. In 1984, the Supreme Court settled the taping controversy with a landmark ruling in favor of home video recording.

With the basic issues of format standardization and legality settled for the foreseeable future, the VCR news of the second half of the Video Decade focused on elemental technological advances. In 1985, SuperBeta pushed up the ceiling of home video picture quality. VHS followed suit with the even greater advance of Super-VHS, first rumored in 1985 but not introduced until 1987. Digital effects also made their debut on American VCRs, bringing picture-in-picture, jitter-free freeze-frame and other sophisticated playback effects out of the production studios and into VCR owners' homes. Further pushing the electronic envelope of home VCR image quality, Sony introduced extended-definition (or "ED") Beta in 1987—as a matter of principle, essentially, since the originator of the Betamax finally went with VHS in early 1988.

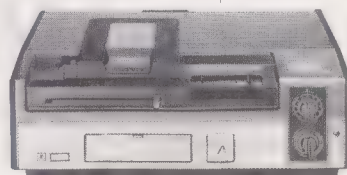
Beyond pure technology, what is it about the VCR that has transformed it from a "\$1,300 toy" (as *Fortune* magazine called it in 1977) to the "toaster of the video age" (as CBS News called it 10 years later)?

• *The pursuit of excellence*—nothing has driven the development of VCRs more than the public's insatiable appetite for ever-better video technology. Over the years, many longtime *VR* readers have gone through a half-dozen VCRs or more, each replaced with the next generation of gear and augmented by sophisticated audio systems, high-performance monitors, surround sound and other advanced accessories.

As a matter of fact, a few of the most zealous videophiles are so hungry for new technology that they'll bite at almost anything,

Sept. 1976
Video Home
System (VHS)
unveiled by
JVC with
"compact"
30-pound
home VCR.

July 1977
V-Cord II home
VCR format in-
troduced by
Sanyo.



Oct. 1977
VX-2000 for-
mat, with first
home remote
control, debuts
from Quasar.



April 1980
Video Review
debuts.

July 1980
First home VCR
lab test by CBS
Technology
Center appears
in *VR*: Hitachi
VT5800A. Hor-
izontal resolu-
tion: 240 lines.



Sept. 1977
RCA goes VHS
with four-hour
model.

Oct. 1979
Ninth Circuit
District Court
of Appeals
declares home
VCR legitimate
and legal.



it seems. In August 1982, *VR* reported the introduction of the first "record-only VCR—created for those who feel obligated to own today's technology but not necessarily to use it." It was a gag, but the letters we received from interested readers were entirely serious (we think).

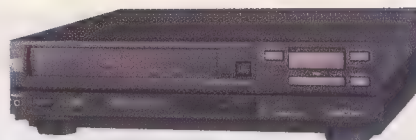
•**Rebellion**—one little-discussed element of the VCR's appeal is its subtle sort of system-bucking. The very use of a VCR has always involved a degree of fighting the network establishment, beating the system—the conquest of the consumer—especially for those who fast-forward through commercials or erase them altogether.

•**Shopping**—another undervalued virtue of VCRs is the new opportunity they provide to shop for tapes in the video store. After all, shopping has now overtaken TV-watching as the most popular pastime in America, according to a study conducted by American Express and Neiman-Marcus. VCRs have made visual entertainment a commodity, shoppable and purchasable.

•**Having**—as a commodity, video entertainment has become possessible, naturally. With VCRs and videotapes, we've gained a great new something to collect, to show off to our guests, to compare with our neighbors and, frequently, to watch. Our cassette collections are also expressions of our precious American sense of individuality; they show off our interests, our tastes, the interests and tastes we want our children to absorb, or those we'd like to have.

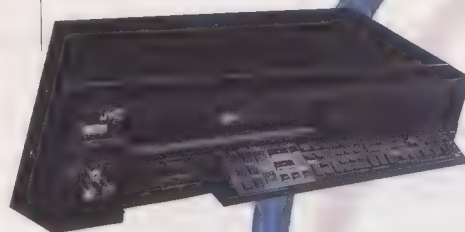
•**Freedom**—we take it for granted now, but VCRs are truly historic for having emancipated viewers from TV programmers. Only with VCRs have viewers been liberated to watch virtually anything, whether available on prerecorded cassette, cable, satellite or broadcast TV, at any time during the day or night. The phenomenon appeals almost spiritually to Americans' instinct for independence.

"Watch what you want, when you want." The idea has practically become a cliché, because most of us do indeed take VCRs for granted today. They're simply an essential part of everyday life—the mystery and surprise are gone. And that fact seems to be the exquisite legacy of the Video Decade, as we turn to the certain new mysteries and surprises in VCRs of the Second Video Decade ahead. □



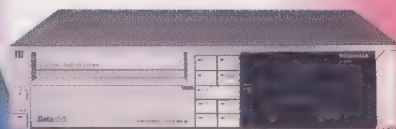
Jan. 1988
Last of Beta makers, Sony, adds VHS models to its VCR line.

June 1987
S-VHS introduced by JVC; ED Beta developed to outdo S-VHS.



Jan. 1987
4mm video announced by Samsung, never to be heard from again.

Sept. 1986
First US-made VCRs completed by Hitachi.



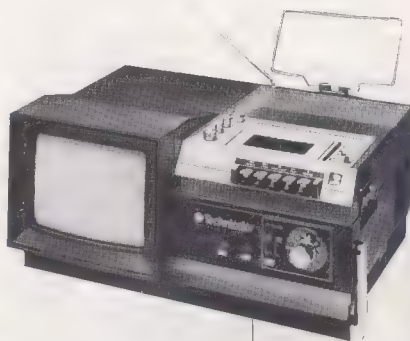
April 1984
Play-only VHS portables debut for rental use.

Jan. 1984
United States Supreme Court rules home VCRs legal. ABC starts TV broadcasts for VCR owners only—sends scrambled movies to decoder connected to VCRs. Scheme scrapped within months.

Feb. 1983
Hi-Fi VCRs introduced by Sony and Toshiba for Beta format. VHS follows shortly after.

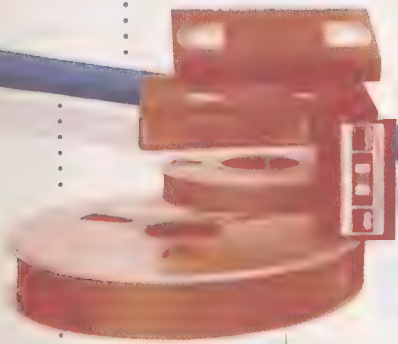
March 1981
First VR blank-tape test—all 18 VHS brands then available tested.

Oct. 1981
Court of Appeals reverses 1979 VCR ruling—VCR use ruled illegal, as copyright violation.



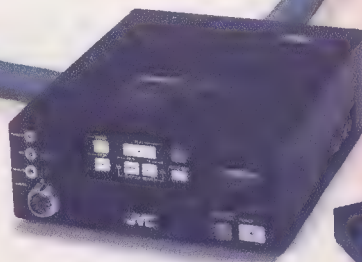
May 1982
UCM format—later renamed Mini-VHS, and finally called VHS-C—reported in VR.

July 1982
\$500 price barrier broken with Sanyo VCR.



Oct. 1980
Quarter-inch CVC format introduced by Technicolor.

March 1982
First portable TV/VCR combo, CVC-format "Video Showcase," tested in VR.



VIDEO'S DIRTY SECRET

A VR investigation exposes dangerously defective prerecorded tapes

By Ron Goldberg

Imagine an el-cheapo brand of gasoline that seems to offer a great bargain to budget-conscious drivers, but is actually contaminated with water, sludge and silt. Or consider the chances a new bakery product, made with generous portions of sawdust along with the flour, might have in today's quality-conscious marketplace. How about budget editions of literary classics which the publisher has made irresistibly cheap, but has dropped letters, words and even whole pages at random from the original text?

It's hard to imagine consumers tolerating any of these scenarios, no matter how much money they could save on the compromised products. But, according to a study commissioned by *Video Review*, a similar attack on basic product quality is now taking place in home video, with hardly a peep from most buyers. In a survey of the low-cost prerecorded tapes now flooding discount stores, VR's Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory discovered defects in over 60% of the tapes it tested. In some cases the problems were minor flaws that might not be obvious to viewers, but other tapes were so shoddily constructed and recorded that they not only produced nearly unwatchable pictures, but could conceivably damage a VCR as well.

The tapes in question aren't the high-priced movies available for rental at local video stores—though they may have some problems too—but rather the cut-rate cassettes filling the bins at most drug and discount stores: bargain-

basement copies of Hollywood classics, last summer's almost-blockbusters and a smorgasbord of cartoons, sports tapes and kid vid. Called "sell-through" by manufacturers, the category of tapes priced to sell rather than rent has grown dramatically in recent years—now making up over 40% of wholesale video revenues—while prices have plunged. With the fall in prices, some manufacturers have apparently tried to save pennies by using low-grade materials, blank tape of dubious origin and shoddy, irregular shells. Adding insult to injury, most of the tapes in the \$15-and-under price range are recorded at the LP (long-play) speed, allowing manufacturers to save money on tape while sacrificing the picture quality and even the playability of the cassette.

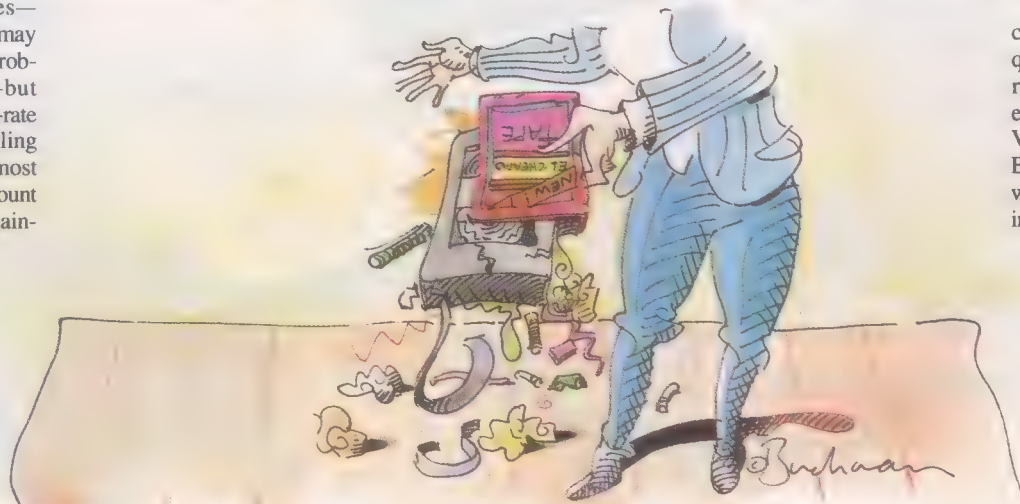
Ironically, due to recent advances in blank tape and recording technology, manufacturers today have the ability to duplicate their programs at higher standards than ever before—if they want to. But many suppliers in the sell-through field—especially the lesser-known companies—simply choose not to. As a general rule, tapes from the major video companies seem to exhibit fewer problems than the no-name brands, but our lab tests revealed problems even in such movies as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *The Woman in Red*. "Buying these

tapes is like throwing dice," says consultant Larry Finley, who advises VHS inventor JVC on tape quality problems in the US. "But unfortunately, a lot of consumers see that low price tag and decide it's worth the risk."

The video industry is starting to wake up to problems that defective tapes may pose for the business. JVC, which administers quality standards for its VHS format, has begun to crack down on substandard tapes in the US with the help of Finley and a US law firm. The Video Software Dealers Association, a video store trade group, has formed a committee to look into defective tapes in rental stores. Tape duplicators and suppliers have also conducted studies to determine how sensitive consumers are to the quality of the tapes they watch.

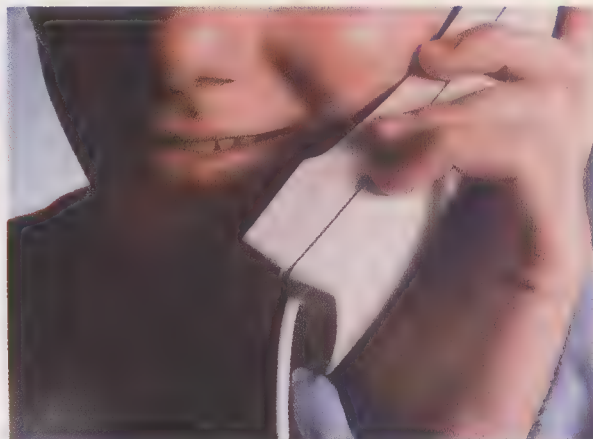
Still, there's no sign that the video industry as a whole is aware of the true scope of the problem. And those who do recognize the problems seem more inclined to blame them on consumers than to tackle the quality shortcomings in the products they sell. Duplicators and programmers contacted by VR indicated that they felt most playback problems are due to consumers themselves damaging tapes. One recent study concluded that consumers who complain about low quality suffer from "unrealistic expectations."

The current crisis in tape quality has its roots in the earliest days of the VHS format. Back in 1976, when JVC first introduced VHS,



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it developed a rigorous set of manufacturing standards that had to be met by any company selling cassettes carrying the official VHS logo. Until recent years, these "licensed" cassettes made up the vast majority of both blank and prerecorded tape sales, and buyers were assured of at least a minimal level of quality. As the video business grew, however, a sleazy subcategory of cut-rate, unlicensed blank tapes began to appear in stores. Most didn't carry the official VHS logo, but as *VR* exposed in a 1988 investigation (see "The Blank Tape Rip-Off," Sept. '88 *VR*), even many low-cost blanks with the official logo were dangerously defective. (One of the tapes in that study shed enough magnetic particles to destroy the video heads in one of APEL's test VCRs.)

The decline in prerecorded quality has followed a parallel track. In the early years of home video, when most movies sold for \$80 or so, duplicators bought finished cassettes from reputable licensed suppliers and recorded programs onto them. As the volume of tapes to be duplicated began to explode in the mid-'80s, duplicators started to look for more efficient methods. Today, most tape duplicators buy blank tape in large bulk rolls known as

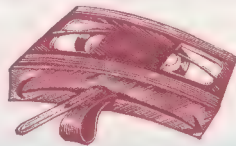
"pancakes," record pictures onto it and then load it into cassette shells.

Although the leading duplicators working this way can produce tapes of the highest quality, there is a catch: Because JVC's system of awarding VHS licenses was originally set up only to cover factories making blank cassettes, the distinction between licensed and unlicensed tapes has become almost meaningless when it comes to prerecorded video. Reputable duplicators make every effort to buy tape and shells that meet the JVC standards, but less quality-conscious dupers often buy their raw materials from the cheapest source they can find—often from the same factories that make the atrocious blank tapes *VR* tested in our "Blank Tape Rip-Off" story last year. Some leading duplicators often have to farm out parts of large jobs to smaller, sloppier dupers when they get overloaded. Thus, there can be huge variations in the quality of even a single release. And the cheaper the price of the final cassette in stores, the greater the pressure on the duplicator to cut corners.

Fortunately, most cassettes in stores come from quality duplicators and offer anywhere from acceptable to extraordinary quality. "Most of the complaints are coming from

only about 10% of the product out there," says TDK's Douglas Booth, who handles the company's blank tape sales to duplicators. And, of course, nobody would expect the same level of quality from a \$10 cassette that a \$90 rental title would deliver. But according to APEL president Frank Barr, the most disturbing finding in APEL's lab test of low-cost cassettes was the extreme quality spread between the best and worst tapes. "I don't care how cheap a tape is, there's just no excuse for some of the things we found," he says. "They're just ripping off the public."

At *VR*'s request, APEL tested 18 pairs of prerecorded tapes, including movies, kid vid and sports, ranging in price from \$5 to \$19.95. The tapes were purchased at a variety of independent dealers and discount stores in New York City and Los Angeles. (To ensure fairness, the cassettes in each pair were purchased at two different stores.) APEL, which has conducted *VR* tests for nearly 10 years as the country's leading video lab, measured how well each cassette conformed to the JVC standards. It's important to note that the JVC standards aren't goals, but rather minimums that are easily met by any reputable manufacturer. (Virtually every major blank tape on the market today greatly exceeds these standards.)



EDITORIAL: NO MORE TRAVESTIES ON TAPE

We'd like Steven Spielberg to take a look at our copy of *Good Times' Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. While it wasn't the worst tape in our survey of low-cost prerecorded cassettes—far from it, unfortunately—it was far from acceptable. Since, like most low-priced movies, it was recorded at the LP (long-play) speed, the picture is soft and fuzzy. Making matters worse are the tiny streaks caused by dropouts (in one sample, there were more than twice the level permitted under the VHS standard). And a flaw in the cassette shell could mean the tape will wear out long before its time.

Is this any way to treat a major motion picture from one of the world's most important directors? We don't think so.

The video industry has worked itself into a paradox: On one hand, it ceaselessly promotes the idea of "sell-through," urging the public to buy and collect cassettes instead of renting. But on the other, all too many of the tapes now priced to sell are so

shoddy they're an insult both to collectors and to the creative people who produced the works in the first place.

Fortunately, a few companies, notably Paramount Home Video and Media Home Entertainment, have announced policies to release sell-through tapes only in high-quality SP versions. Let's hope they start a trend. But a more drastic, industry-wide commitment to quality is needed. After all, if too many consumers get burned buying defective discount tapes, they may stop buying tapes altogether; and that will hurt the responsible companies as much as the irresponsible ones.

We propose a video summit meeting where the leading video companies and organizations can begin to develop some guidelines to stem the flood of defective tapes. Video consumers deserve some basic guarantees when they buy tapes—regardless of price:

1. **Acceptable technical quality.** VHS inventor JVC has established minimum quality standards for all VHS tapes. Any tape du-

plicator who can't or won't meet these standards has no business in the video business.

2. **Clear policies on LP and EP duping.** Duplicating tapes at these slow recording speeds means a major reduction in picture quality. Consumers may feel the compromise is worth the savings, but all LP and EP tapes should be clearly marked as such on the box (and not just in the fine print).

3. **Honest packaging.** Consumers shouldn't have to wait until they get home to discover that the tape they just bought is only 20 minutes long or that the star on the box only makes a brief cameo. Responsible companies don't treat their customers like suckers.

Video Review will send a copy of this investigation, along with our call for a video summit, to all the leading video labels, duplicators, the International Tape/Disc Association, the Video Software Dealers Association and JVC. We'll also send a copy to Steven Spielberg.

—James B. Meigs

After monitoring the complaints of *VR* readers and conducting our own informal viewing tests, we expected the worst from the APEL survey. We got it (see "You Call This a Bargain?" right). Some cassettes were the victims of poor raw materials. One copy of *The Woman in Red*, for example, was plagued by over four times the number of dropouts (tiny picture streaks caused by magnetic particles flaking off the tape) allowed by JVC. Quite a few tapes suffered from irregular shells, which can jam in some VCRs, and wobbly tape hubs, which can cause excessive tape wear over time. Based on this survey, it seems quite possible that many types of tape damage that occur after 10 or 20 plays—problems that some industry members assume are caused by users—are actually due to defects in tape shells and hubs that gradually damage the tape.

Unfortunately, even duplicators using decent materials may sabotage tape quality through careless

Continued on page 110

YOU CALL THIS A BARGAIN?

What did you expect for five or 10 bucks? A lot better than this, we'll bet. For this investigation of low-cost tape quality, we tested 18 identical pairs of prerecorded VHS tapes, and to make sure the samples came from different production batches, we bought each tape in a pair at two separate outlets. The retail price listed in the chart reflects the highest amount we paid for each sample. All the tapes were given a full technical evaluation by the Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory. We also ran subjective viewing tests of all our samples.

We felt a certain amount of pessimism before the tapes even entered the VCR. In fact, many of our samples still sported an unbroken erase tab—a sure sign of careless production.

Our viewing tests confirmed our initial pessimism. Since only five of the 18 programs were recorded in the SP mode, we were prepared for questionable picture and sound quality. But what we didn't expect was program quality that was barely worth the tape on which it was recorded. For example, Silver Screen's *Daffy Duck* reels appeared to have been dubbed directly off a TV master—including obvious commercial blackouts. Goodtimes' *Nixon's Most Memorable Speeches* neglected to make one thing perfectly clear... why was his 1974 resignation speech in black and white when the entire nation saw the same broadcast in color? Sports Legends Video's *Jackie Robinson* tape struck out by including almost five minutes of promotional footage—in a program running less than 30 minutes! The all-time loser, though, was Front Row Video's *Time Out for Hilarious Sports Bloopers*. The entire tape looked like someone had shot it off a TV screen. And it wasn't even funny.

APEL arrived at similar unfortunate conclusions. More than a third of the samples tested showed dropout rates far in excess of the VHS standard (50 long-term dropouts per minute). Dropouts are caused by any number of problems: oxide particles that don't stick to the tape because of bad tape binder, warped cassette hubs that rub across the tape surface and careless loading techniques by the manufacturer—not to mention starting off with second-quality tape. These long-term dropouts are measured from sections at the beginning, middle and end of the tape, and are perceived as "noise lines" on a TV screen. In very serious cases, tapes that shed too much can destroy a VCR's video heads.

Audio uniformity (the difference in volume between left and right channels) was another problem we found in many

Title	Company	Dropouts			Audio Uniformity (in dB)		Physical	Retail Price
		(beg., mid., end)			(left, right)		(pass/fail)	
Close Encounters of the Third Kind	Goodtimes	26	33	38	.2	.3	Pass	\$14.95
Close Encounters of the Third Kind	Goodtimes	120	80	23	.1	.2	Fail	
Daffy Duck	Silver Screen	22	19	31	.1	.9	Pass	\$ 2.99
Daffy Duck	Silver Screen	40	22	71	.1	.4	Pass	
Dakota	Republic Pictures	17	9	7	.1	1.4	Pass	\$14.95
Dakota	Republic Pictures	20	4	10	.4	.2	Pass	
Farm Frolics	Troy Gold/Viking	123	148	13	.4	1.2	Pass	\$ 3.99
Farm Frolics	Troy Gold/Viking	33	62	54	.6	.7	Pass	
Grizzly	Media	21	4	16	.1	1.3	Pass	\$ 9.88
Grizzly	Media	9	3	7	.1	.1	Pass	
Killers from Space	Goodtimes	127	40	38	.2	.2	Fail	\$ 5
Killers from Space	Goodtimes	273	90	28	.1	.4	Fail	
My Favorite Brunette	Goodtimes	41	19	25	.1	.4	Pass	\$ 5
My Favorite Brunette	Goodtimes	34	14	31	.1	.2	Pass	
Nixon's Most Memorable Speeches	Goodtimes	77	68	67	.3	2.2	Pass	\$ 9.88
Nixon's Most Memorable Speeches	Goodtimes	169	46	57	.1	1.6	Fail	
Old Boyfriends	Embassy	7	8	17	.2	2.2	Fail	\$ 9.99
Old Boyfriends	Embassy	37	12	24	.2	.2	Fail	
Raffi in Concert	A&M	20	8	10	.1	.6	Fail	\$19.95
Raffi in Concert	A&M	31	3	16	.1	.2	Pass	
Jackie Robinson	Sports Legends	28	15	12	.2	.5	Pass	\$ 4.99
Jackie Robinson	Sports Legends	181	38	108	.1	.2	Fail	
Son of Godzilla	Video Treasures	22	23	32	.1	.3	Fail	\$ 9.95
Son of Godzilla	Video Treasures	124	35	62	.1	1.1	Fail	
Time Out for Hilarious Sports Bloopers	Front Row	35	46	60	.4	.2	Fail	\$ 9.99
Time Out for Hilarious Sports Bloopers	Front Row	49	48	48	.3	.2	Fail	
Superman Cartoons	Silver Screen	23	35	18	.1	.7	Fail	\$ 2.99
Superman Cartoons	Silver Screen	63	17	10	.4	.5	Fail	
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre	Video Treasures	46	22	33	.3	1.9	Fail	\$ 9.99
The Texas Chainsaw Massacre	Video Treasures	70	19	24	.1	.5	Fail	
The Three Stooges	United American	12	18	6	.1	.2	Fail	\$ 3.99
The Three Stooges	United American	11	13	11	.2	.3	Fail	
All-Star TV Bloopers	Goodtimes	45	39	60	.4	.5	Fail	\$ 9.99
All-Star TV Bloopers	Goodtimes	196	31	49	.1	.3	Fail	
The Woman in Red	Video Treasures	34	234	24	.2	.7	Fail	\$ 9.88
The Woman in Red	Video Treasures	83	8	44	.1	.4	Fail	

Tests conducted by APEL. For dropout results, the number of long-term, (15-microsecond) dropouts per minute were measured.

of our test samples. Since non-Hi-Fi programs use the edge of the tape to record audio tracks, poor uniformity is a sure sign of tape-edge damage caused by faulty tape slitting (literally the "slicing" of wide tape stock down to the 1/2-inch VHS standard) or winding. Edge damage is also a degenerative condition, because with each ensuing play the tape will fray even further.

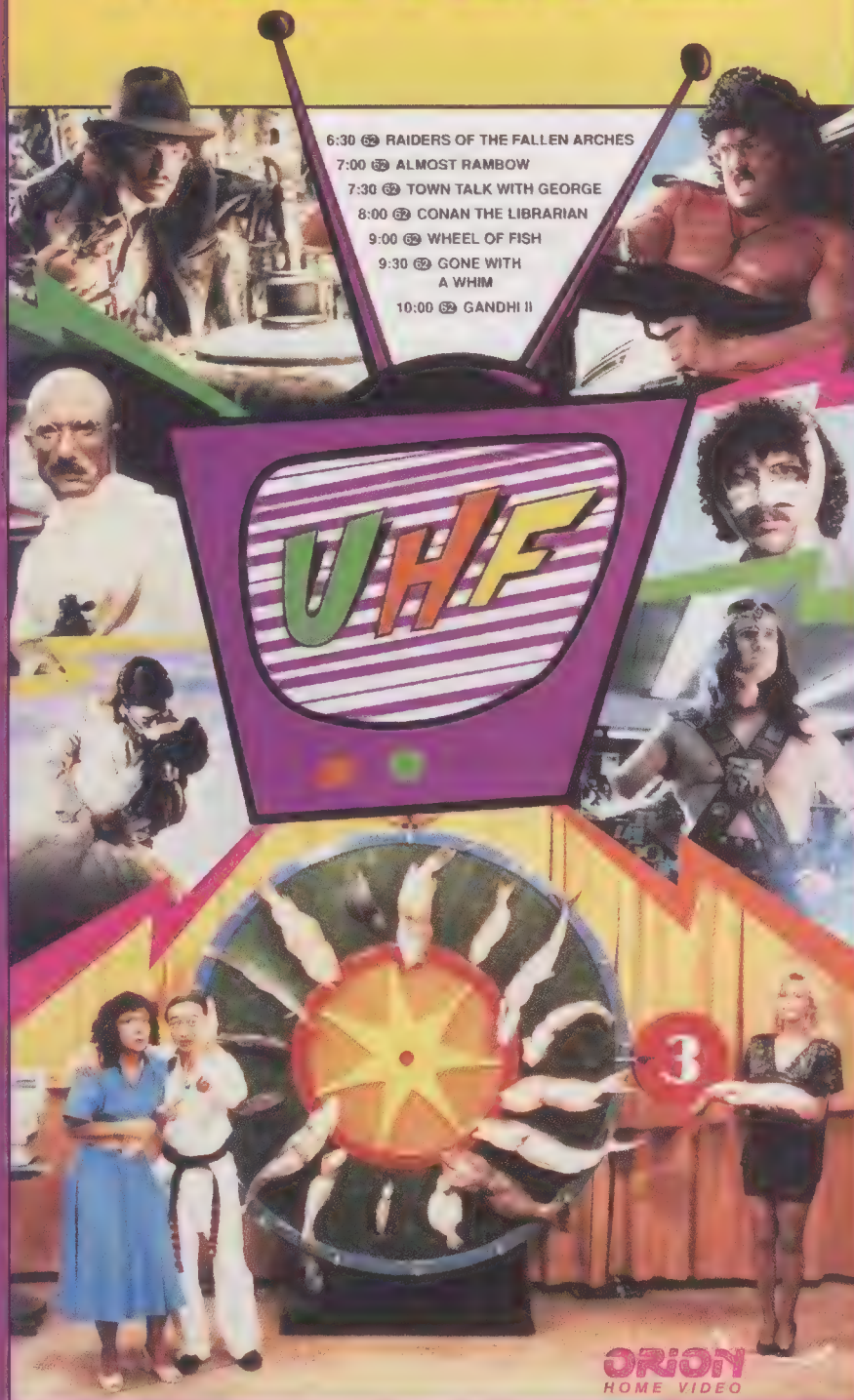
APEL also performed standard tests on the cassette shells themselves.

Measuring such physical properties as cassette height and width, amount of spool wobble and length of leader tape, APEL found that the bottles weren't any better than the wine: Over 60% of the tapes failed the physical examinations.

This is not to say that all the samples tested were bad. In fact, several offered quite a bang for the buck. Media Home Entertainment's *Grizzly*, packaged with a sticker proudly boasting an SP re-

cording and top-quality tape, gave a clear picture and good quality sound. Republic Pictures Home Video's *Dakota* was not only a pristine SP recording of the John Wayne classic, but also included full production credits on the box. Unfortunately, with other companies, quality often varied wildly from tape to tape. Video Treasures' *The Woman in Red* looked fine on one sample, but another had more than 25 times the number of major dropouts! —R.G.

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JENNIS O'CONNOR... "AL" YANKOVIC... "WHEEL OF FISH"... GILBERT MCKINWOOD... JOHN WYSE...
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eady or not, here they come. High-definition television sets with wide screens and amazing picture quality. Giant, flat-screen TV monitors that hang on a wall. Recordable laser videodiscs to store HDTV images in a durable, digitally perfect state. All this and much, much more... but not quite this year.

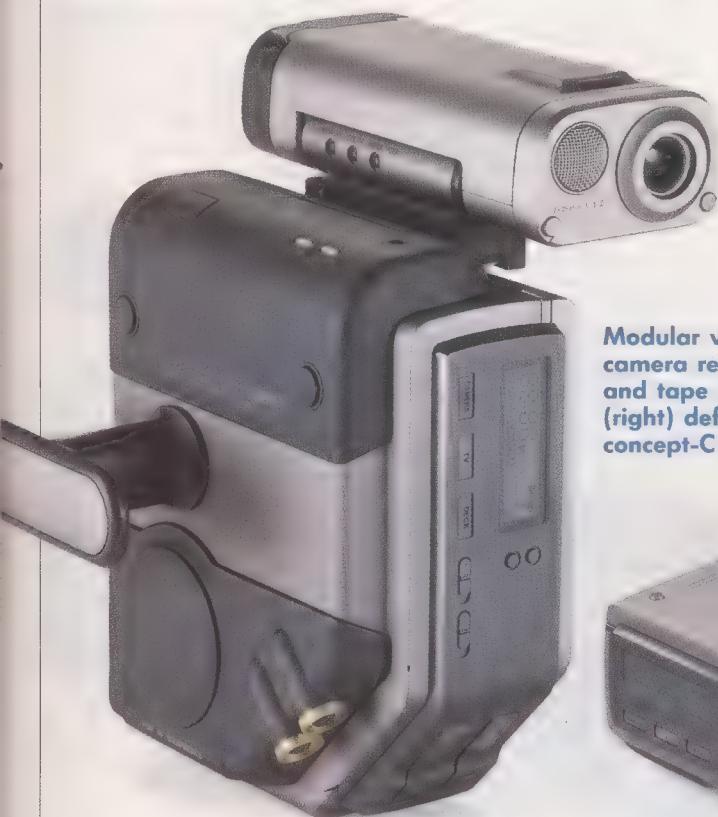
For 1990, the minds that decide what products arrive in consumer electronics stores are set on tweaking. That is, they are pushing the standards they've already defined for TVs, VCRs, laserdisc players, camcorders and audio components just a tiny bit further. Much of this tweaking is designed to bring current technology closer to the aforementioned ideals and, based on exclusive reports we've managed to gather from sources around the globe, some of it will result

in truly exciting gear. And, with VCR, camcorder and TV sales at something of a plateau, manufacturers will be forced to adopt more competitive tactics.

The consumer dividends from all of this are rather nice: better products, frequently at lower prices. But that's not to say the '90s won't contain challenges for consumers. Some of the equipment due to break ground in 1990 will carry premium prices, and video enthusiasts will again need to weigh the advantages of new features very carefully before upgrading their systems.

In preparing this report, we visited labs in the US, Japan, Taiwan and Europe to see the products that will reach stores this year as well as the prototypes that will follow later in the '90s. Here are our forecasts for each of the major product categories.

BY GREGORY P. FAGAN



Modular variations for camera recording (left) and tape playback (right) define JVC's tiny concept-C system.



PERSONAL VIDEO

While it's easy to ignore the "Second Coming of the Walkman" hype surrounding these tiny TV/VCR combinations, there is no denying that they are truly cool. That may explain why there's so much more going on in personal video this year than last.

The concept-C system that JVC previewed at last summer's Consumer Electronics Show in Chicago will receive its formal introduction later this year. Designed to counter the 8mm video format's head start in the laptop video market, this modular VHS-C (compact) system includes separate camera, recorder, three-inch LCD monitor, tuner and power components which snap together like a James Bond rifle.

Sony, which started the personal video movement last year with its combination 8mm VCR/three-inch LCD TV—the Video Walkman—will likely remain in the forefront when it introduces the first FL (flat-loading) transport-equipped model this year. (Sony would not confirm this, but acknowledged that they're "looking at it.") The new model, designated the GV-100 in Japan, shrinks the current GV-9's hardcover book-sized dimensions down to paperback size. Like JVC's concept-C, the smaller Video Walkman has been demonstrated with a tiny, optional camera.

While JVC and Sony engage in an all-out VHS-C-vs.-8mm battle to offer the most in the least amount of space, Panasonic will enter the personal video fray with a laptop computer-sized model that combines a full-size VHS Hi-Fi player with a four-inch LCD TV. Panasonic had expected to have the roughly 6½-pound PV-M429 in stores by the end of '89. A US introduction of the smaller S-VHS-C Hi-Fi A/V Pocket Watch (see "Laptop Video," Aug. '89 VR), which Panasonic is selling in Japan, hasn't been ruled out yet, but inside sources are skeptical.

LASER VIDEO

"1990 will be the moment of truth for laser video," says Robert Gerson, editorial director of *TWICE*, a weekly consumer electronics trade magazine. Panasonic and NEC, which will enter the laser-disc player market by mid-1990, may finally dispel the notion that laser video is an *enthusiasts-only* format.

Carl Laufer, Panasonic marketing director for laser disc players, is mum on the exact specifications, but the two Panasonic combination LV/CD/CD-V players, he says, will offer S-video outputs and digital effects at a reasonable price. The more expensive of the two will also include fiber optic, digital audio output and the new one-bit MASH audio processing. Panasonic's MASH (for multistage noise shaping) audio processing is a new, theoretically improved

digital-to-analog converter (DAC), designed to be more effective and less costly than the standard 16- and 18-bit DACs.

Philips, which also has one-bit technology at its disposal, may also offer it in a player this year. But, according to audio marketing manager David Birch Jones, not until a few things are worked out. "It's like having a little radio transmitter in there," Jones says, referring to the Philips one-bit system's 11-MHz operating frequency. Philips engineers are currently exploring ways to isolate the one-bit DAC circuits so that they won't interfere with the video image, Jones says.

Audio quality will be a primary concern when Proton introduces its laser disc player by year's end, according to chairman Frankie Hong. In Taiwan the company's engineers are currently working with designer Reinhold Weiss (see "Better By Design," June '89 VR) on a combi player that will fit in with Proton's recently introduced 600 series audio components.



Write on: Pioneer's recordable laser disc system.

The laser format's biggest supporter, Pioneer, plans "no drastic changes in technology," says marketing vice president Mike Fidler. But, that's not to say that the company's engineers are resting. Working with KDD, a large Japanese communications firm, Pioneer has developed a rewritable (recordable) laser videodisc system for professional use. The first prototypes can record up to 30 minutes of video with analog audio on either side of a 12-inch disc, according to reports. The performance specs are pretty impressive—with a horizontal resolution of 400 lines and a video signal-to-noise ratio of 45 dB. A source quoted the developers' estimates that the recorder will be available to professionals for around \$21,000, with discs selling in the neighborhood of \$1,400. Although Pioneer isn't predicting when the system's price might fall to consumer levels, some analysts foresee recordable disc players in homes by the mid- to late-'90s.



Laptop computer design inspires Panasonic's latest personal video product (left); the Toshiba S-VHS-C camcorder with Hi-Fi stereo (right).

VIDEOCASSETTE RECORDING

The VCR—home video's cornerstone component—turns 15 this year, and video insiders expect little change beyond refinements in programming ease, tape access speed and general convenience. Several Toshiba VCRs, for example, will include front-panel A/V inputs in a design idea labeled "camcorder friendly" by the manufacturer.

"We're trying to make decks that are as simple as we possibly can," says Toshiba video marketing manager Claude Frank. In addition to the traditional auto-play, auto-rewind and auto-eject capabilities of current VCRs, the new Toshiba models will scan through a tape until a control signal is detected. In other words, if you've left a blank 30 seconds or so at the beginning of a tape, the deck will automatically cue the tape up to where the program begins.

Compact cassette compatibility (in other words, VHS decks that accept VHS-C tapes *without* an adapter) will make something of a splash this year. Both Panasonic and JVC plan spring '90 intros, and a few other VHS-C camcorder manufacturers are expected to bow CCC decks as well.

In the high-end, Mitsubishi will likely bow an upgrade of its HS-U80 S-VHS deck in the second half of the year. Current plans call for the deck to include an innovative head design recently devised by Mitsubishi's Kyoto engineers which allows for perfect, noise-line-free forward and reverse scanning.

Sony is reportedly tooling up one of its Japanese plants to produce S-VHS VCRs. While nobody at the company would confirm that a Sony S-VHS deck will arrive in US stores this year, sources' comments on the format lacked Sony's earlier anti-S-VHS vehemence.

Panasonic and Quasar designers are currently discussing the viability of voice-conformation programming systems for more VCRs. The technology is a spinoff from existing phone-call programming circuitry, and examples will likely arrive in electronics stores this summer. These decks may also include electronics which produce messages on the machine's LED panel. Current Japanese models sport a cheery "HELLO" on the panel when turned on and "HAPPY NEW YEAR" on the appropriate day.

TELEVISION

The key word in TVs next year will be "big." Big screens, big sound and plenty of IDTV (improved-definition television). The size emphasis springs from consumers' enthusiastic embracing of the home theater concept.

Few companies have pursued the home theater builder as aggressively as Mitsubishi, and the company's new model, with a 120-inch screen, represents its grandest effort yet. The approximately eight-by-six-foot screen can mount on or in a wall, and its projection kit requires only 6½ feet of space behind the screen.

NEC will offer a front-projection model for the theatrically inclined as well. The 120-inch DP-3000S, which springs more from the company's Multisync PC monitor line than its traditional TV line, will be sold in tandem with a separate IDTV processor (which improves picture density by doubling the number of horizontal scanning lines making up the image). NEC vice president Brian Williams says that the system will sell for under \$20,000.

In more conventional sizes—and prices—Philips' long-awaited IARC (internal anti-reflective coating) projection sets, originally announced in the summer of 1988, should finally reach stores this month. Past demonstrations of the IARC models proved very impressive: The design clearly improves on the brightness, resolution and contrast of conventional projection sets.

Philips plans to introduce an IARC model later in the year, with the interlace-eliminating IDTV circuitry used on the company's 27- and 31-inch direct-view models. Proton also plans to include IDTV circuitry in its first projection set, a 50-inch model due late in the year. (Panasonic and NEC plan additional IDTV sets for 1990, and Sony is considering rear-projection IDTV introductions as well.)

In the tube department, Sony recently premiered a 32-inch screen model in Japan employing the styling used

Continued on page 110

LIQUID CRYSTALS:
NEW AGE TV SCREENS

Sometime early this year, Toshiba expects to begin selling an LCD (liquid crystal display) TV with a 6½-inch screen. That's not exactly big enough to place on a cart in the living room, but it should enable you to watch a football game without worrying that you've picked up your child's ant farm by mistake. Hitachi already introduced a laptop TV/VCR combo (model VT-LC50A) with a full five-inch LCD screen. Much larger displays—up to 20 inches or more—have been built in research labs.

At least one major manufacturer, Philips, plans to replace all of its 20-inch and smaller CRT sets with LCD models within the next decade. "We feel that it's just a matter of time," says Mark Stephenson, Philips' director of marketing for color TV. "The picture tube is an antique. It ought to be in the Smithsonian."

For now, Stephenson's view is grounded more in hope than reality, but the theory is compelling. LCDs offer several advantages over conventional picture tubes: They're thinner, lighter and require less power to operate. But since they don't generate light, LCDs require a light source—typically fluorescent—behind the panel, to create a picture. In theory, simple LCDs would eventually be cheaper to make than tubes. But for now, low production yields keep the cost high.

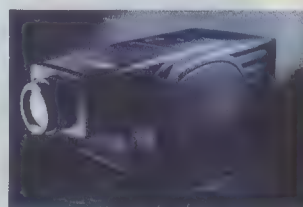
The price break needed to lower the cost of LCDs isn't likely to happen in 1990. Sharp, for example, has demonstrated its 20-inch LCD set at several trade shows in the past few years, but the company isn't close to actually introducing one. Knowledgeable TV engineers estimate that Sharp—or any other company working with that size screen—must build 100 20-inch displays in order to find one that will work.

The yields aren't much better on the new five- and 6½-inch sets from Hitachi and Toshiba, perhaps 15% or so. But the manufacturers hope that as sales pick up, the volume will lead to higher yields and lower prices.

These sets all fall short of the mythical flat-panel wall TV that has enchanted engineers for years. But a joint venture in Japan is expected to yield just such a set within five years. At least nine manufacturers are cooperating with the country's Ministry of International Trade and Industry to develop what sources describe as a one-meter-square LCD. As much as \$400 million has gone into the project, according to sources.

Sharp is now selling a portable LCD front-projection TV that can display a picture of up to 100 inches. JVC's LCD projector is expected to reach the US later this year. Panasonic, Casio and Toshiba have developed LCD projection prototypes.

Panasonic already has demonstrated the fruits of this research: a 40-inch rear-projection model that's significantly lighter and thinner than CRT projection sets. Like Sharp's XV-100 projector, the Panasonic model employs three LCD panels and a single light source, in this case a short-arc halide lamp that produces an impressively bright picture. It's also sharper than most LCD images. With a substantial pixel increase—300,000 per panel compared to about 92,000 in Sharp's set—Panasonic claims a horizontal resolution specification of 480 lines. Panasonic has yet to announce any firm plans to introduce the set, but Pat Griffiths, of Panasonic's Business Engineering Center, says it will be out "in more than a year and less than 10."—Martin Levine



Sharp's new
LCD projector.





PHILIPS IDTV. THE MOST SIGNIFICANT INNOVATION SINCE COLOR.

Not since the introduction of color has a breakthrough in video created such a quantum leap in life-like picture quality. The picture definition is so superior, *Video Review*, *High Fidelity* and *Popular Science* exclaimed Philips IDTV "Product of the Year." And from *Audio Video International*, "Innovation of the Year."

No wonder. Philips IDTV (Improved Definition Television) shows you an image that has greater accuracy, better definition and less noise than any conventional television available today.

Superior technology. Conventional television and monitors display 262½ scanning every 1/60th of a second to "paint" the image on the screen. With Philips non-interlace technology, the scanning rate is doubled to 525 lines. Scanning lines become virtually invisible and vertical resolution is improved by 40%. And Philips'

patented "Median Filter Algorithm" overcomes distortion typically associated with other double scan systems.

Superior features. With Picture-In-Picture (PIP) and dual tuners built in, two programs can be watched simultaneously. PIP also allows previewing up to nine channels at once on the screen. "Still Picture" freezes images that otherwise would be missed. Our 49-button Philips LCD/Learn Uniremote also controls most TVs and any brand of VCR, cable or audio product.

Throughout the world, Philips has long set the standards for audio and video performance. We continue our leadership in digital technology with Philips IDTV—the highest critically acclaimed innovation in today's television technology.

To appreciate IDTV's life-like picture quality, call 1-800-223-7772 for your nearest Philips video specialist.

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PHILIPS

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THE GREAT VIDEO REVIEW SHOOTOFF



Once again, we're looking for a few good home movies. The 1990 Great *Video Review* Shootoff is underway, and we're hoping to bring in more (and even better) entries than last year. Are you up to the challenge? Entries will be judged by some of the toughest critics in the business, but the rewards are

worth fighting for. Besides receiving an impressive lineup of prizes, many of our entrants will see their home videos on national television. If you think your home movies are good enough for Hollywood, or just good for a few laughs, The Great *Video Review* Shootoff is the contest for you.



THE CATEGORIES

ON THE ROAD: Here at VR, we're too busy to travel on the Orient Express or see the Pyramids, but you're not. Send us your best travel/vacation tape to show us what we're missing. We're eager for exotic locales, or original slants on traditional vacations. Last year's entries took us from Cairo to Kalamazoo.

REAL LIFE: Here's your chance to offer up anything that falls between *60 Minutes* and *Candid Camera*; unscripted tapes of extraordinary people, places and things. Subjects can come from almost anywhere—work, play, the news, a day in the life, weddings, sports, you name it.

F/X: Is your idea of a dream job a stint with Industrial Light and Magic? Then this category is for you. Dazzle us with sights and sounds we've never seen before. Any entry, narrative or abstract, that relies heavily on the use of effects, either high-tech or low, will qualify here.

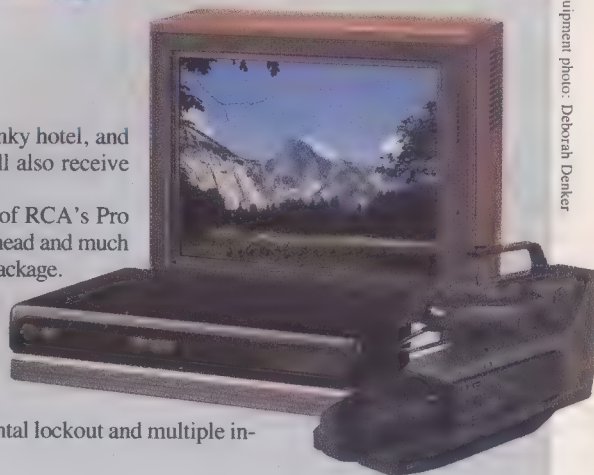
TALES ON TAPE: Truth may be stranger than fiction but it's not as much fun. Here's an opportunity to create your own reality on videotape. Fictional narrative tapes are what we're looking for here, so run free. We're open to any genre you can think of: drama, romance, comedy, music video.

THE PRIZES

GRAND PRIZE

The Grand Prize winner and a guest will be flown to New York, put up in a swanky hotel, and participate in an awards ceremony and possible TV appearances. The winner will also receive some top-flight RCA video gear:

- **The CC360 Pro Wonder S-VHS camcorder.** Packed with the exciting features of RCA's Pro Edit line (including a built-in character generator, video/audio dubbing, flying erase head and much more), this model adds the high-resolution picture of S-VHS to an already impressive package.
- **The VR625HF VHS Hi-Fi stereo VCR.** Here's a deck that's equally at home time-shifting TV programs or editing home movies. It features VHS Hi-Fi, a flying erase head, an MTS decoder for receiving stereo broadcasts and more.
- **The F31375CP ColorTrak 2000 monitor/receiver.** This 31-inch set boasts a high-resolution video picture and such exciting digital picture effects as freeze-frame and video zoom. On-screen menu controls, a multifunction universal remote, parental lockout and multiple inputs are only a few of the exciting features this set also includes.



Equipment photo: Deborah Denker

The four First Prize winners will receive a terrific package of home moviemaking accessories to help give future productions a more professional look:

- **Ambico's V-0540 tripod.** A light, portable tripod that's the very essence of versatility. Its fluid head makes panning and tilting a breeze.
- **Azden's WMS-PRO wireless microphone system.** Praised in the pages of *Video Review*, this innovative system delivers clear sound from distances of 250 feet or more.

- **Recoton's V615M color processor/enhancer/distribution amp/stabilizer.** Copies of your home video movies will look almost as good as your masters when you use the V615M to boost color, tint and detail.
- **Sima's CamLight 3.** Light, portable and self-powered, this camera-mounted light brightens up your home tapes without the hassles of cords or external battery packs.

Eight Second Prize winners will receive

Coast Manufacturing's Oasis video camcorder bag. "Timeless as infinity," this durable bag will hold practically all your shooting gear.

Twenty Third Prize winners will receive a Great *Video Review* Shootoff T-shirt, a three-pack of TDK Super VHS tape and Allsop's video head, tape path and tape drive cleaner. An indefinite number of Honorable Mention winners get a T-shirt.

THE GREAT VIDEO REVIEW SHOOTOFF OFFICIAL RULES

ENTRY

1. Submit a videocassette of your movie in any of the following formats: VHS, VHS-C, S-VHS, S-VHS-C, Beta, ED Beta, 8mm. Any configuration of consumer home video moviemaking equipment (including separate camera/VCR combinations) is eligible. (We do not encourage the use of prerecorded music on video soundtracks unless you have the rights to such music. In the event that your tape wins, broadcast display may be impossible unless the rights to the music synchronization can be secured.)
2. Only one video movie per entrant will be allowed. No entries longer than 15 minutes will be eligible. Shorter entries are encouraged.
3. All cassettes must be labeled with your name, address, phone number and movie title. Include a check or money order for \$3, payable to *Video Review*, as an entry fee. Enclose with each entry the complete official entry form (or copy it onto a plain piece of paper).
4. Mail your videocassette entry, entry form and fee to: **THE GREAT VIDEO REVIEW SHOOTOFF, VIDEO REVIEW, 902 Broadway, New York, NY 10010.** Entries must be received by January 31, 1990. *Video Review* is not responsible for late, lost or misdirected mail.

ELIGIBILITY

1. Only amateur videographers may enter. All professional submissions will be disqualified. Any amateur videographer is eligible if his or her primary occupation does not involve shooting or producing videos. (If you earn a little extra money shooting weekend weddings, for example, you are still eligible.)
2. All entries must be the work of the entrant. No material previously submitted to other contests or previously broadcast or publicly displayed will be eligible. Entrants are required to attest to compliance with these provisions.
3. This contest is open to residents of the United States, except employees (and their immediate families) of *Video Review*, RCA Consumer Electronics Division of Thomson Electronics, all prize sponsors and their affiliated companies, and advertising, promotion or public relations agencies.
4. All entries become the property of *Video Review*. Finalists may be asked to supply their original source tapes, which will be returned. All other entries cannot be acknowledged or returned. Void where restricted or otherwise prohibited by law. All federal, state and local laws and regulations apply.

CONSENT

1. Winners consent to the use of their names, entries, photographs or other likenesses

for advertising, promotion, public relations or broadcasting on behalf of *Video Review* without further compensation to winners for such use. Winners must be available for advertising, promotional, public relations or broadcasting appearances.

2. If entry is the result of a group effort, the prize(s), including travel arrangements to New York City for the Grand Prize winner, will be awarded to one person and a companion designated by the group. Companion of Grand Prize winner will be required to execute a Liability/Publicity Release.

PRIZES/JUDGING

1. Entries will be judged by *Video Review* critics on the basis of artistic and technical merit in four categories: *On the Road*, *F/X*, *Tales on Tape* and *Real Life*. *Video Review* will award one Grand Prize to the best overall entry (regardless of category) and four First Prizes, one in each of the above categories.
2. The Grand Prize consists of round-trip coach air travel for two people to New York City, two nights double occupancy hotel accommodations, attendance at the prize ceremony, \$200 spending money, an RCA F31375CP ColorTrak 2000 stereo monitor/receiver, RCA VR625HF Hi-Fi stereo VCR, and RCA CC360 Pro Wonder Super VHS camcorder. Retail value: approximately \$5,000.
3. First Prize winners will receive one set containing each of the following video accessories: Ambico V-0540 Tripod, Azden WMS-PRO VHS wireless microphone system, Recoton V615M color processor/enhancer distribution amplifier/stabilizer and Sima CamLight 3. Retail value for each set: approximately \$800.
4. Eight Second Prize winners (awarded to the next best entries) will receive a Coast Manufacturing Oasis Video Camcorder Bag. Retail value: approximately \$200.
5. Twenty Third Prize winners (awarded to the next best entries) will receive one set containing each of the following: a "Great Video Review Shootoff" T-shirt, an Allstop video head, tape path and tape drive cleaner and three TDK S-VHS blank tapes. Retail value for each set: approximately \$125.
6. An indefinite number of Honorable Mention Prizes may be awarded by the editors of *Video Review*; winners will receive a "Great Video Review Shootoff" T-shirt.
7. Judges' decisions are final. By entering this contest, each entrant accepts and agrees to be bound by these rules and the decision of the judges.
8. Winners will be notified by mail (no phone calls, please). All prizes will be awarded and are non-transferable. One winner per household. No cash substitutes. Taxes are the sole responsibility of the winners.

WINNERS LIST

1. For a list of prize winners, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope by May 15, 1990, to **THE GREAT VIDEO REVIEW SHOOTOFF WINNERS LIST, VIDEO REVIEW, 902 Broadway, New York, NY 10010.**

Name _____
(please print)

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone (area code) _____

Title of Movie _____

Category (please check) ☐ On the Road ☐ F/X
☐ Tales on Tape ☐ Real Life

Format _____

Equipment used: camcorder _____

In connection with my videotape entry, I warrant and represent to *Video Review* as follows:

1. My videotape entry is my original work; neither it nor the exercise of any right, license or privilege granted to *Video Review* hereby violates or will violate, infringes or will infringe, any literary, artistic, dramatic, personal, civil or property right or right of privacy or "moral right of authors" or any law or regulation or other rights whatsoever of, or slanders or libels, any person, corporation or association whatsoever.
2. I am not a professional videographer.
3. Any necessary consents and releases of persons appearing in my videotape entry, or whose names, voices, or likenesses are used in connection with such videotape have been obtained.

I understand and agree that if I am a prize winner in The Great Video Review Shootoff, *Video Review* shall have the non-exclusive license to use my videotape entry, alone or in conjunction with other entries, as a home video or on free or cable television, for publicity purposes, com-

mercial gain or any other purpose whatsoever, without compensation to me (except as may be determined by *Video Review*) or anyone appearing in such videotape, or whose name, voice or likeness is used in connection therewith. This understanding and agreement concerning a non-exclusive license is being relied upon by *Video Review* in receiving entries and awarding prizes.

I consent to the use of my name and photographs of me as the creator-producer of my videotape entry in connection with any of the foregoing uses by *Video Review*.

Signature _____

(If you need more space, please use an additional piece of paper. Don't forget your \$3 entry fee, payable to *Video Review*.)

RCA CAMCORDERS CHOSEN NUMBER ONE IN AMERICA.

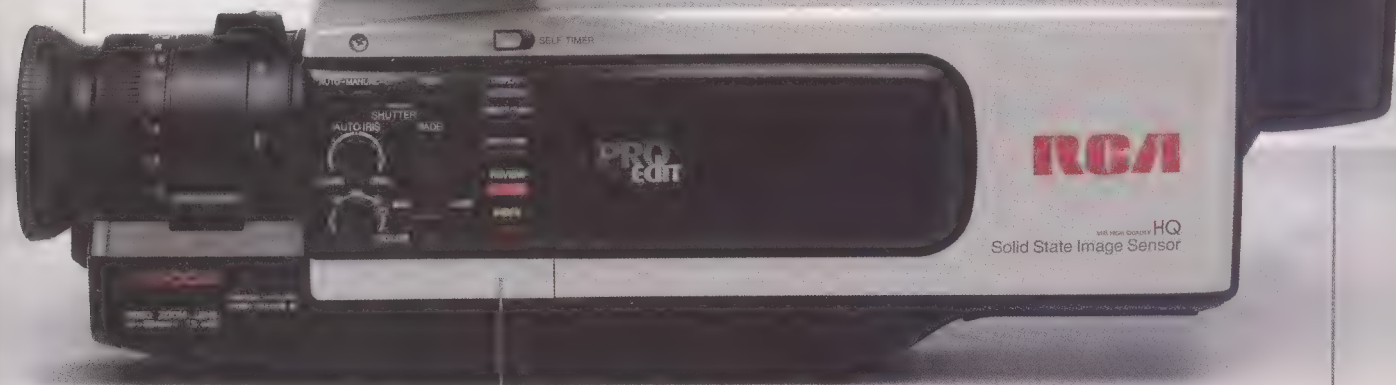
Electronic Viewfinder: doubles as a monitor for instant playback.

Edit Search: lets you scan and precisely position tape for your next recording.

A/V Dubbing With Flying Erase Head: dubs new audio or video onto pre-recorded tapes.

Mic Mixing: allows you to add narration and music.

8x Zoom With High-Speed Shutter: includes automatic exposure system.



Time-Lapse: varies intervals between exposures for high-speed and animated videos.

Rechargeable Nickel-Cadmium Battery: holds up to two hours' worth of power.

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The new, highly advanced RCA ProEdit™ camcorder is equipped with features many would consider remarkable in a studio, let alone a camera.

Quite simply, it places in your hands the most comprehensive array of recording and editing capabilities ever assembled in one camcorder.

These range from sophisticated dubbing features that allow such professional touches as narration and background music, to a time-lapse function

that lets you create animated videos.

Of course, there's another reason you end up with such professional video with the RCA ProEdit. It gives you a better picture to begin with.

Thanks, in part, to a flying erase head that eliminates the irritating video distortion typical of scene transitions in conventional camcorders.

Also included among the RCA camcorder's many convenient operating features is a built-in mini-speaker

that allows you to monitor your tapes during playback without the need for cords or earphones.

All of which strongly argues for a visit to your RCA dealer. Where you'll discover the pleasures of creating truly exceptional amateur video.

As opposed to video that's merely amateurish.

RCA

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C R I T I C S C H O I C E

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Greatest Movies*

COMEDY

BY NEAL GABLER

Of all the genres, comedy is certainly the one that most resists analysis. Talk about the mechanisms of comedy and you sound like one of those pompous, pointy heads the Marx Brothers were always harassing. Discuss the whys of humor and you're like a nasty kid pulling the wings off a fly. Humor either soars or it doesn't. The minute

you begin tugging on its wings, you destroy it. Or put another way, the critical process is so fundamentally unfunny that it seems a sacrilege to apply it to comedy—which is one reason why criticism seems so insufficient in the face of great comic talents.

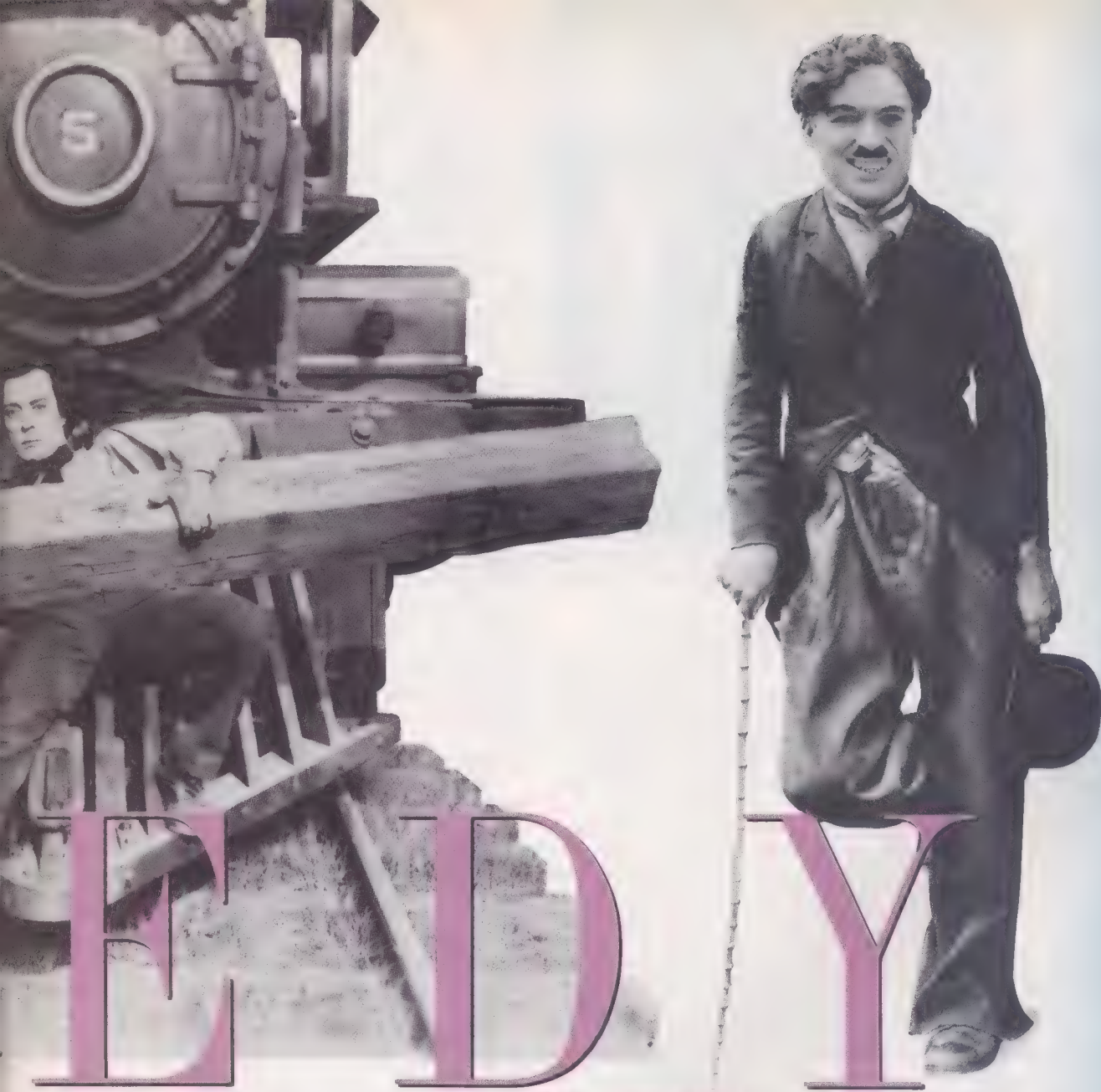
Still, the great comedians and the great comedies are not only funny—though that is certainly what attracts us to them in the first place. Comedy is also cosmology. The great comic artists always use their humor to express a vision the way so-called “serious” artists express a dramatic vision—and, as the gags mount up, the lines accumulate, the situations complicate, we can begin to discern something

profound and affecting. We can begin to discern not only what makes the jokes funny (a realm in which analysis is irrelevant) but also what makes them meaningful to us. As a personal standard of judgment, I would submit that the truly great comedies, the ones we can watch repeatedly and the ones that endure, are those that convey the most interesting and complex cosmologies. So what follows is not a list of the funniest comedies on video or even my favorite comedies; it is really a sampler of 10 movie comedies that I regard as the fullest and most satisfying comic visions now on videocassettes and discs.

THE GREAT HUNT (1925)

Any discussion of comic visions invariably begins with Chaplin, who almost seems to have invented the notion for the movies. Chaplin's early popularity among intellectuals was even predicated on the fact that he wasn't *merely* funny; in fact, many of his intellectual adherents took him to task for his more vulgar and ribald shenanigans. They wanted Chaplin to be sublime, an instrument of comic grace and beauty, and Chaplin so desperately wanted this kind of legitimization that he quickly refined his comedy to suit them, attaching himself to older comic traditions rather than luxuriating in the mudbath of lowbrow American slapstick. For many of us, Chaplin is *too* eager to





demonstrate his genius, and his movies too often degenerate into brilliant set pieces, the main purpose of which seems to be self-admiration. In all his movies, the world is cruel and malign. But just as Charlie "redeems" the various objects he touches by transforming them through his imagination, he redeems the people he touches by turning on his beatitude.

This is the very heart of Chaplin's art, and one sees it best, I think, in *The Gold Rush*. If not his most self-reverential and self-pitying picture (*City Lights* takes those honors), it most artfully and entertainingly expresses his comic vision. In *The Gold Rush*, set in the icy Alaskan mountains, Charlie waddles over the snowdrifts to seek his fortune, gets trapped in a cabin with two hungry prospectors, descends to town where he is spurned by a bargirl, and then finds happiness when his ingenuous but unmistakable goodness softens her heart. The gold rush itself is a perfect metaphor for Chaplin's social vision of greed and indifference, and his set pieces here are among his most memorable: the cabin teetering on the precipice as Charlie and his partner race back and forth, ravenous Charlie imaginatively transforming his shoelaces into spaghetti, his "dancing" the Oceana Roll with forks and dinner rolls. The end is sticky and sentimental, but that is part of the bargain with Chaplin. (*Budget, KVC and Video Yesteryear cassettes*)

THE GENERAL (1927)

In the ongoing and basically fatuous debate over whether Chaplin or Buster Keaton is the greater comedian, I come down on the side of Buster. There is much less sentimentality with Keaton and much less solipsism too. If Chaplin's routines seem calculated to impress us with his brilliance, Keaton's seem engineered to show us his mastery—even his mastery with the camera. Mastery is important to Keaton. It is his technique for dealing with an inhospitable world, as Chaplin's physical grace and powers of mind are techniques for dealing with his. Chaplin transforms. Keaton escapes—and he escapes by carving off a piece of the universe which he feels he can control. Hence Keaton's preoccupation with machinery. In *The General*, one of Keaton's most accomplished movies, he commandeers a locomotive during the Civil War: a small man literally attempting to master an engine of history. (*Cable Films and Video Dimensions cassettes*)

MONKEY BUSINESS (1931)

Chaplin and Keaton, along with Harold Lloyd, formed the triumvirate of silent-movie comedy, and each in his own way conformed to Walter Kerr's conception of comic man, who "lives inside and beneath a contention of weights and pressures

Two early masters of movie comedy (above): Keaton in *The General*, Chaplin in *The Gold Rush*. And one later mistress (left): Dustin Hoffman in *Tootsie*.



CHRISTOPHER GUEST'S 10-BEST LIST

Christopher Guest has established a reputation as one of the funniest minds of the '80s; first, with his tenure on what some consider *Saturday Night Live's* finest season, and then with his role as guitarist Nigel Tufnel in *This Is Spinal Tap*. More recently, he's branched out into writing and directing with *The Big Picture* (upcoming, from RCA/Columbia).

When cornered, he lists these as his favorite comedies, in no particular order: **THE MUSIC BOX (1932)**

"Laurel and Hardy's *The Music Box* to me is a classic setup." (Hal Roach cassette) **STOLEN KISSES (1968); MY DINNER WITH ANDRE (1981)**

"The things I find funniest are invariably in movies that aren't considered comedies." (Stolen Kisses: RCA/Columbia cassette; My Dinner with Andre: Pacific Arts cassette, LV disc)

A NIGHT AT THE OPERA (1935)

"There are other Marx Brothers movies I like, but this just seems to be the densest in the best sense." (MGM/UA cassette, LV disc) **SHERLOCK, JR. (1924)**

"Buster Keaton was the biggest influence on my childhood. It's difficult to explain why; there's just something in his presence—the stone face, perhaps." (Not available; excerpts appear in Buster Keaton—A Hard Act to Follow: HBO cassette)

THE HEARTBREAK KID (1972)

"Always has been one of my favorites... just the tone of it is very unusual, and I think Chuck Grodin is great." (Media cassette, LV disc)

ANNIE HALL (1977); MANHATTAN (1979); LOVE AND DEATH (1975); TAKE THE MONEY AND RUN (1969)

"In modern comedy, Woody Allen makes me laugh more than anyone." (Annie Hall: MGM/UA cassette, LV disc; Manhattan: MGM/UA cassette, LV disc; Love and Death: CBS/Fox cassette, LV disc; Take the Money and Run: CBS/Fox cassette, LV disc)

—Steve Simels

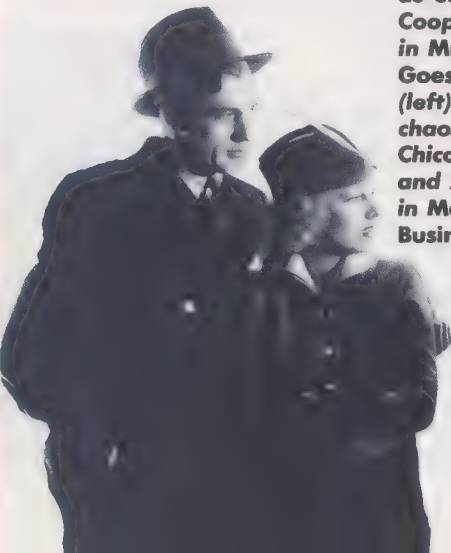


Romantic comedy nonpareil: Dunne, Grant in *The Awful Truth*, a "wonderfully subversive" movie.

that may come together with a thundering clap at any moment." It remained for the first great sound comedians to create that thunderclap themselves. Unlike the silent greats, the Marx Brothers aren't seeking an accommodation with the world. They are looking for a way to level it. From one perspective, the brothers loosely represent the stages of American man: from Harpo the Primitive to Chico the Immigrant to Groucho the Sharpie. It is a telling evolution: Modern man becomes essentially a self-serving con artist.

It has become almost obligatory to cite *A Night at the Opera* as the classic expression of the Marxian vision, but I prefer *Monkey Business*—which is far more chaotic and slapdash, but also, for my money, truer to the wild spirit of the Marx Brothers. When they are set loose on society, the Marxes are a savage force not because they are less avaricious, dishonest or self-involved than the rest of society, but because they are *more* so. The difference is that Groucho's avarice is naked. He makes no pretense of being anything other than what he is, which gives him an advantage over his antagonists, who must always shroud their cupidity in something grand. The scene in *Monkey Business* in which the stowaway Marxes try bluffing their way off an ocean liner by impersonating Maurice Chevalier is so baldly ridiculous that it takes absurdism to new heights. (MCA cassette, LV disc)

Social comedy as Capra-corn: Cooper, Arthur in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* (left). Comedy as chaos: Groucho, Chico, Harpo and Zeppo in *Monkey Business*.



MR. DEEDS GOES TO TOWN (1936)

It is a long way from the absurdism of the Marx Brothers to the sentiment of Frank Capra. Capra is widely regarded today as the Norman Rockwell of American movies, a mythologist who fabricated an innocent America that was virtuous and plain-spoken, wise and guileless. In fact, what Capra, a Sicilian immigrant, did was not so much fabricate a new America as impose the imagery and ideas of his Roman Catholicism on his adopted land. In the sense that comedy is really triumph, and victory over death the ultimate triumph, Capra once called the *Resurrection* the greatest comedy. (It was an idea to which he would return in his 1946 masterpiece, *It's a Wonderful Life*, where the hero is literally resurrected.) Capra's social comedies of the '30s and early '40s also have a distinctly Christian configuration. The hero is always a good man, buffeted and even tempted by evil forces. Yet he resists temptation, squarely challenges the evil and is figuratively killed (Mr. Deeds' sanity hearing, Mr. Smith's trumped-up disgrace, John Doe's unmasking), only to resurrect himself. Through his sacrifice, others will live. By binding American mythology to religious mythology, Capra created a powerful theology of comedy, a democracy of divinity that fuels some extraordinary movies and makes him, in my estimation, the very greatest of American moviemakers. The purest articulation of Capra's vision may just be *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*, in which Gary Cooper plays a small-town greeting-card poet who lives out a contemporary Christian drama—the divine democratized. (RCA/Columbia cassette)

THE AWFUL TRUTH (1937)

I must confess a special weakness for lumpy romantic comedies—such as *Libeled Lady* and *Easy Living* from the mid-'30s (neither movie is available on video, regrettably), and *The Shop Around the Corner* or *The Devil and Miss Jones* from the '40s. All are more or less small and not perfect, but they are thoroughly delectable nonetheless. To my mind, however, romantic comedy achieves absolute perfection in Leo McCarey's *The Awful Truth*, a glorious picture that has managed to remain somewhere on the margins of popular film history rather than shoulder-to-shoulder with *Gone with the Wind*, *Casablanca* and the major Capra pictures, where it belongs.

It begins with Cary Grant and the incomparable Irene Dunne agreeing to a divorce when Dunne discovers Grant had lied about a business trip. The rest of the picture concerns their reunification, even though Dunne is quickly affianced to a rich yokel oilman (played by Ralph Bellamy) and Grant to a bloodless society dame. Both these prospective mates are truthful—that is, honest and faithful. They don't promise the little deceptions with which Grant and Dunne have goaded one another. They're squares. And that, in fact, is what makes the truth so "awful." Yes, Grant deceives Dunne, and no, he doesn't seem to measure up against the sincerity of Bellamy, but this may be the price one has to pay for—well, for fun. To quote Dunne, "We had some good laughs together." It's a wonderfully subversive suggestion in a wonderfully subversive movie: The basis of





The laugh's on New York in Manhattan, with Woody Allen, Mariel Hemingway (left), and on England in Fawlty Towers, with John Cleese.



Photo: Jani Werner

romance is not slavish fidelity, grand passion or heartfelt integrity. The basis of romance is laughter. Perhaps this is the subtext of all transcendent comedies. Laughter is the great unifier—the secret we all share and the protection we all don against the assaults, indignities and pretensions we suffer and the tedium we fear. (RCA/Columbia cassette, LV disc)

STARTING OVER (1979)

Writer/director James Brooks cut his teeth on television sitcoms, where he learned how to plant gags. But he also brought sentiment to his material, which makes him an heir to the brilliant comic directors of the '30s, such as Capra and Leo McCarey. *Starting Over*, written by Brooks and directed by Alan J. Pakula, is a movie of smallish aspirations, but it is as perfectly tooled a modern romantic comedy as one is likely to find these days. Burt Reynolds is torn between the erotic blandishments of his self-centered ex-wife (Candice Bergen) and the homey comforts of a brightly scrubbed school marm (Jill Clayburgh). Here, as in his later movies such as *Terms of Endearment* and *Broadcast News*, Brooks assays contemporary America as a tussle between glamour and decency, aesthetics and morality. (Paramount cassette, LV disc)

MANHATTAN (1979)

What is that thud you hear? Probably the sound of movie critics tripping over one another as they race to genuflect at Woody Allen's feet. Like Chaplin before him, Woody Allen became a victim of his own and others' expectations. It wasn't enough *just* to be funny; Allen apparently felt the need to legitimize his comedy by subjugating it to his comic vision, rather than letting his comedy carry the vision. He rapidly transformed himself from one of the sharpest and funniest moviemakers into one of the most unbearably tendentious. But in *Manhattan*, which I regard as Allen's best, he achieves equipoise. As Isaac Davis, a television comedy writer, Allen is searching for something of value and permanence in a world of trivia and trash—though, unlike Chaplin, he implicates himself in the moral void. When Isaac asks Allen's eternal question—why is life worth living?—and answers with a litany of small pleasures that keep us afloat in the churning seas of effluvia, he provides a powerful justification for his art as well as its most poignant expression. (MGM/UA cassette, LV disc)

TOOTSIE (1982)

One of the true glories of the romantic comedy is that it manages to reconfigure itself to meet changing romantic expect-

tations. *Tootsie*, which meets feminism squarely on its own terms by suggesting that a feminine perspective is one of the bases for a satisfying relationship, is a comedy of extraordinary richness and complexity. Michael/Dorothy (Dustin Hoffman) can only become a better man by discovering the anima within himself. That's one level. On another level, *Tootsie* uses acting as a metaphor for the psychological impediments we erect on the path toward our own romance. It is only when the role-playing evaporates, when Michael draws upon his full self, that he can deal honestly with himself and others. What is remarkable is that even though this is all obviously embroidered on a farce (what else can support a man in drag?), it is affecting as well as uproarious. (RCA/Columbia cassette, LV disc)

LOCAL HERO (1983)

Scotsman Bill Forsyth makes the sort of amiably oddball little pictures that tickle your funny bone rather than jab you in the ribs. Forsyth's narrative construction, or lack of it, is itself a thematic statement not unlike Woody Allen's litany of life-sustaining forces. *Local Hero* is ostensibly about an oil executive who ingratiates himself with the townspeople of a Scottish village with the intention of buying up their land for a refinery. But the plot, like the oil refinery, gradually bleeds out of the movie, leaving behind all sorts of beautifully strange and evocative little touches: a motorcyclist buzzing through town, an old hermit on the beach, an untended baby, a sky filled with stars. *These*, not the narrative constructions we impose on our lives, are what make it all worthwhile. (Warner cassette)

FAWLTY TOWERS (1984)

Television, whatever else it does, is not ordinarily a purveyor of great and enduring comic visions. But John Cleese's Basil Fawlty, the perpetually harried proprietor of a tatty English inn, is an inspired exception. *Fawlty* is the legatee of the greatest silent clowns: the little man put upon by everyone and everything, clinging desperately to his dignity, snapping back at the injustice of his existence, but never quite scoring a victory over it. Cleese, originally one of the Monty Pythons, is the silver ball in these pinball plots—binging and careering through each episode. He is a marvel. And so are the half-hour episodes compiled in this video series. (CBS/Fox cassettes) □

Neal Gabler's book *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* has won the Los Angeles Times Book Award for 1989 in the history category. He is the former co-host of TV's *Sneak Previews*.



Perfectly tooled "little" comedies: Peter Riegert, Burt Lancaster in Local Hero (below); Jill Clayburgh, Burt Reynolds in Starting Over (right).



FRAN LEBOWITZ'S 10-BEST LIST

"Comedies are the hardest movies to make because of how the movie business screws around with writers," says Fran Lebowitz, the bestselling author of *Metropolitan Life* and *Social Studies*. "I told my agent I'd be happy to sell my books to the movies only if they would promise not to make them."

Here's a list of her 10 favorites:

THE WOMEN (1939)

"I think it's far and away the greatest American comedy, because the writing is so good." (MGM/UA cassette, LV disc)

ALL ABOUT EVE (1950)

"I doubt this requires any explanation." (CBS/Fox cassette, LV disc)

THIS IS SPINAL TAP (1984)

"To me, that's the greatest comedy of the last 10 years. I heard they improvised a lot of it, but I don't like to think that's true." (Nelson cassette, LV disc)

THE HEARTBREAK KID (1972)

"Again, I think the writing is terrific." (Media cassette, LV disc)

THE PALM BEACH STORY (1942)

"It's hard to imagine that one of my favorite comedies would have Rudy Vallee in it." (MCA cassette, LV disc)

SOME LIKE IT HOT (1959)

"The thing I like best about it, again, is the writing, as opposed to the drag scenes." (MGM/UA cassette, LV disc)

THE IN-LAWS (1979)

"I love this movie. The dictator who makes that little face on his hand—that's hilarious." (Warner cassette)

SITTING PRETTY (1948)

"Clifton Webb is terrifically funny in this." (No available)

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING EARNEST (1952)

"I think it's the best comedy ever written, period, or a play. But it's also quite a good movie." (Paramount cassette)

ANNIE HALL (1977)

"With *Annie Hall* there are pieces of writing that are wonderful. But it's a little sentimental for me." (MGM/UA cassette, LV disc) —S.S.

REVIEWS

LATEST MOVIES



The Joker's on him: Keaton takes flight as the caped crusader.

BATMAN ★★★

Jack Nicholson, Michael Keaton, Kim Basinger, Robert Wuhl, Billy Dee Williams. Directed by Tim Burton. 1989. Rated PG-13. (Warner cassette, 126 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, \$24.98) □

BY ANDREW SARRIS

I don't have to recommend that you check out *Batman* at your nearest video store. It will be all I can do to get out of the way of the expected stampede to the counter.

Inasmuch as *Batman* grossed more than \$240 million in its theatrical release, it is difficult to recall all the doubts and misgivings published about the production before it opened. The numerous and highly articulate admirers of the Bob Kane comic books condemned the casting of a comic actor such as Keaton as Batman. At early screenings, the industry's wise guys with the big cigars spread fear stories about the movie being too arty, too dark and too downbeat for the feel-good kiddie trade. So what happened? Obviously, a great many things.

The media packaging of the event fully exploited the brilliant production design of Anton Furst. People were ready and

eager for the sleek lines of the jet-black, high-tech Batmobile as it came careening through Gotham City. And the Halloween transvestism of the Batman costume appealed to the bit of camp in all of us. More to the immediate point, if you loved the movie, you are bound to love the video-cassette. Mostly enclosed within an artificial studio setting, *Batman* does not have its style cramped on a small screen. Director Burton has availed himself of both the dynamic expressionism of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* and the morbid futurism of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*.

But there are problems with this *Batman*. The tension slackens too often for the sake of uneasily satiric humor and an indulgence of Nicholson's wildest flights of villainous fancy. Who could have ever imagined back in the late '30s when *Batman* was born graphically that the day

would come when the Joker (Nicholson) would get top billing over Batman himself (Keaton)? For a cranky old moralist like me, the celebration of homicidal evil on a mass scale is too typical of the decadent and depraved age in which we live. Nicholson's Joker kills off dozens of Gothamites as part of his Felliniesque circus act, and Keaton's Batman does not redress the moral balance by acting to avenge the wrongs inflicted on his fellow citizens. Least of all is he concerned with upholding law and order. What motivates him most strongly are his own personal furies, unleashed when his parents were murdered in cold blood by a younger Joker.

Still, it was wise to keep Keaton's Batman comparatively quiet and secretive next to Nicholson's Crazy Eddie-style Joker. It was wiser still to give the movie a serious, grown-up gloss with Danny Elfman's quasi-Wagnerian score, and thus win over enough of the critics to give a classy reputation to what is, after all, an adaptation of a comic book.

Basinger is adequate as the girl, but there are no sparks ignited between Keaton and her. Yet '80s women can put up with Keaton's Batman because he is more nervously vulnerable than confidently macho. As for the background songs of Prince, they serve mainly to augment the nervy impudence of Nicholson, who remains our favorite satanic hellraiser.

All in all, you could do a lot worse than this *Batman*—even though you could certainly do a lot better, too.

WHEN HARRY MET SALLY... ★★★

Billy Crystal, Meg Ryan, Carrie Fisher, Bruno Kirby. Directed by Rob Reiner. 1989. Rated R. (Nelson cassette, 96 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, \$89.98) □

BY LEONARD MALTIN

It's no secret that *When Harry Met Sally...* turned out to be one of the major moviegoing treats of the year in its recent theatrical release. But a movie that depends as much as this one does on

ABOUT THESE REVIEWS

To parallel the viewing environment of most home viewers, VR critics normally review programs in their homes. Unless otherwise indicated: All tapes are SP; all LV discs are EP. All programs are in color unless marked B&W. □ indicates closed captions for the hearing-impaired; DS indicates Dolby Surround sound.

- ★★★★ OUTSTANDING
- ★★★ GOOD
- ★★ AVERAGE
- ★ BELOW AVERAGE

Andrew Sarris is the movie critic of the New York Observer, professor of film at Columbia University and author of numerous books about the movies.

A new, updated edition of Leonard Maltin's bestselling TV Movies & Video Guide has just been published.



Some enchanted meeting: Ryan, Crystal.

repartee could conceivably wear thin on second viewing. It could even wear out. So I'm happy to report that the minute I started watching *When Harry Met Sally...* on cassette, I found myself laughing all over again—at the same lines and situations I enjoyed on a theater screen.

That's not just because Nora Ephron wrote a good script and Rob Reiner directed it so well. It isn't just that Billy Crystal embellished the dialogue so ingeniously (in a tailor-made role). Or that Meg Ryan is so appealing. It's because the jokes in this picture are based on a reality that many of us can relate to.

Harry and Sally first meet in 1977, as strangers who are sharing a ride from Chicago to New York. Their paths cross again a number of times during the next 12 years, but it isn't until the climactic portion of the movie that they realize they're in love with each other. In a world where relationships have become strained, over-analyzed and difficult to maintain, it's easier than ever to accept this premise, even though it remains here a movie contrivance.

The chemistry between Crystal and Ryan is perfect, and they get first-rate support from Kirby and Fisher as their best friends. These secondary characters could have been played as caricatures, but instead they're made both real and likable by actors who aren't exactly typecast for their warmth. It's just one of the movie's many surprises.

Reiner's romanticized view of Manhattan rivals Woody Allen's, and his use of vintage popular music (much of it played and sung by Harry Connick Jr.) makes the comparison to Allen even stronger. But calling this movie Allen-ish is merely a form of shorthand, not an indication of a rip-off. *When Harry Met Sally...* is a witty, engaging, thoroughly entertaining picture about relationships. If that's being imitative, then I could stand a lot more movies just like it.

WOMEN ON THE VERGE OF A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN ★★★

Carmen Maura, Antonio Banderas, Julieta Serrano, Rossy de Palma, Kiti Manver. 1989. Rated R. Directed by Pedro Almodovar. (Orion cassette, 88 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$79.98)

BY ANDREW SARRIS

This was the opening night selection for the 1988 New York Film Festival, and it is generally considered to be one of the Spanish director's more "accessible" movies for mainstream international audiences. Almodovar himself has generally verged on the utterly outrageous in the realm of sexual role-playing on the screen. Part of his critical cachet is based on the notion that his brand of camp farce could not have been made in the days of Franco's Spain.

On the surface, this English-subtitled version of *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* seems to strut about with a flippantly feminist slant as it covers some 48 hours of the adventures and misadventures of a Spanish soap opera queen in the process of being jilted by her married lover. Maura and Banderas do not try for any poignancy or depth of feeling as the harried ex-lovers, but they don't play their parts for belly laughs either. Like everyone else in the cast, they are energetic enough to keep things moving, but too sophisticated to indulge in the old Lupe Velez "Mexican Spitfire" type of screeching and screaming.

There are no hidden thematic depths, but there is a stylistic subtext in Almodovar's brightly colored and kinetic *mise en scene* that links him historically to such masters of the ironically overwrought



Woman on the Verge of the unexpected.

domestic melodrama as the late Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Douglas Sirk. For this reason, I am compelled to express a very strong reservation about the video transfer of this widescreen movie into the

more traditional dimensions of a fully utilized television screen. The opening and closing credit titles are letterboxed so that all the names can be squeezed in, but then the movie itself is squared off and panned and scanned for the rest of its running time. I realize only a minority seems to care about this issue, and that there is really no perfect technical solution to the problem (particularly when moviemakers keep working in Panavision and other widescreen processes *knowing* that they will lose a portion of their image for more than half of their eventual viewers). There is no plot loss in the video transfer, of course. But much of the rollicking stylization of the endlessly lateral explorations of all the campy bric-a-brac of contemporary Madrid is squeezed out of the spirit of the movie.

An interesting sidelight for movie buffs is the movie *within* the movie, as the focus of a dubbing job Maura and Banderas take on as part of the plot. It is Nicholas Ray's deliriously perverse *Johnny Guitar* with Joan Crawford and Sterling Hayden. In another life, Almodovar would probably have been directing Crawford in women's weepies with all the emotional conviction he could summon for this campy task!

This is a movie meant primarily for connoisseurs of visual style, but it is also a pleasant and ultimately painless entertainment for the rest.



THE MIGHTY QUINN ★★★

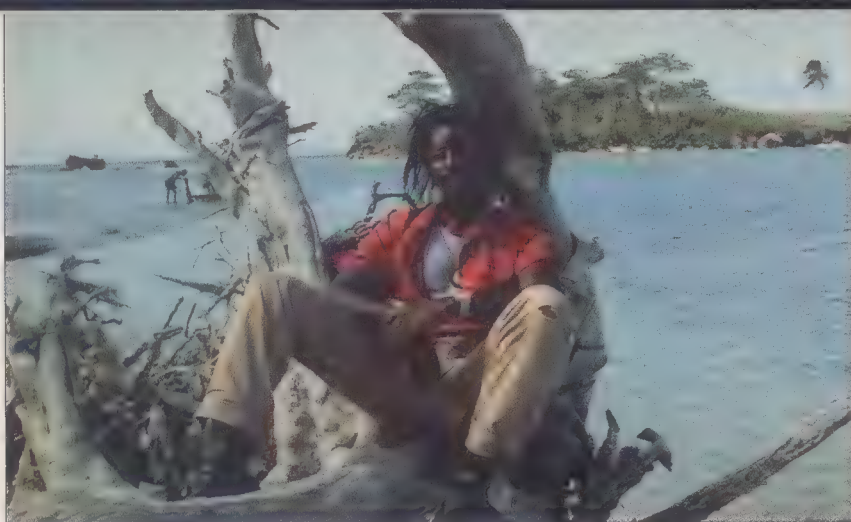
Denzel Washington, Robert Townsend. Directed by Carl Schenkel. 1989. Rated R. (CBS/Fox cassette, 98 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.98)

BY ROBERT DIMATTEO

A little local color goes a long way in a movie, especially when that movie is a thriller with a plot full of holes; the picturesque details plug up the holes. So it is with this modestly entertaining, tropical whodunit. Shot in Jamaica, with that island posing as an unnamed Caribbean country, the movie has its share of pulp predictabilities (presumably adapted from A.H.Z. Carr's novel). But it is carried along on an audio-visual swirl of iridescent clothes, balmy beachscapes and funky music pouring out of smoke-filled reggae clubs.

Casting off the noble, eloquent air that he assumed so memorably in *Cry Freedom*, Washington here tries his hand at the sort of action hero/leading-man part that usually goes to pumped-up white stars. Good actor that he is, Washington brings a touch of thoughtfulness to the proceedings. He plays Quinn, a likable local who has forsaken his loose-living, piano-

Robert DiMatteo is a movie and TV critic for United Features Syndicate and 7 Days.



Mighty Quinn's Townsend: out on a limb with island intrigue.

playing days to become a somewhat stiff and upright police chief. When his childhood friend (Townsend, sporting dreadlocks) is suspected of murdering a wealthy white businessman, Quinn is drawn into the case. Before he's done, he has uncovered an elaborate scheme that involves some very highly placed officials in Washington.

But the plot is the least of it. Swiss director Schenkel knows enough to let his cameras linger on a choice musical number—the Bob Dylan-penned title song, sung in a trio by Sheryl Lee Ralph (playing Quinn's estranged wife) and two of Bob Marley's daughters; or Quinn rediscovering the musician in himself while plunking out "Cakewalk into Town" at the keyboard. And Schenkel knows a juicy character when he has her—Esther Rolle's imperious turn as a local witch, a wheelchair-bound mama done up in a turban, with yellow feathers festooning her brightly colored caftan. Smoking a corncob pipe and chanting imprecations, Rolle is a voodoo vision that can make a viewer grin. Add Townsend's lively version of a Rasta-style reprobate, and you've got enough reasons to give this flavorful little thriller visitation rights in your home.

WEEKEND AT BERNIE'S ★★★

Andrew McCarthy, Jonathan Silverman, Terry Kiser. Directed by Ted Kotcheff. 1989. Rated PG-13. (IVE cassette, 101 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

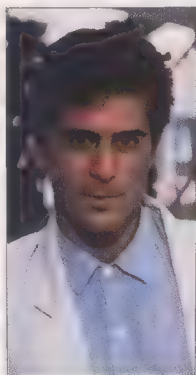
BY ED HULSE

You know the kind of embarrassed laughter that sometimes erupts when someone walks into a door? We really shouldn't laugh because the person might be hurt, but we just can't help it. That syn-

Longtime VR critic Ed Hulse is the editor of Previews magazine and former host of TV's Movie Mania.

drome is amplified by this movie's hysterically tasteless gags and situations. *Weekend at Bernie's* was a surprising success in theaters this summer and I suspect it'll be equally popular on video.

Junior accountants Larry (McCarthy) and Richie (Silverman) uncover evidence of massive embezzlement at their company and immediately inform their boss, Bernie (Kiser). They don't know that he's engineered the pilfering to pay off some shady "business partners." Bernie invites the guys to spend a weekend at his lavish beach house where, presumably, they can be dealt with. Instead, a hit man is dispatched to silence Bernie because his co-conspirators feel he's become a liability. Larry and Richie arrive to find their host dead and, fearful that they'll be implicated in his murder, attempt to conceal Bernie's demise from the



Silverman, McCarthy: mortis riggers.

seemingly endless parade of party guests who wander in and out of the beach house at all hours.

As scripted by Robert Klane, this exposition takes up almost half the movie. When things finally get moving, *Weekend* delivers a nonstop cornucopia of blackly comic gags, visual and verbal, that revolve around the indecorous treatment of Bernie's corpse. Labeling these gags crude or sophomoric is woefully inadequate; *Weekend* actually may be the zenith

(or nadir, depending on your point of view) of the school of irreverent comedy exemplified by the early *National Lampoon* and the raunchiest *Saturday Night Live* sketches.

Make no mistake, *Weekend* is definitely a no-brainer. Even if you like it, you'll probably be ashamed to admit it. But don't let that stop you from renting it.

THE DRESSMAKER ★★★

Joan Plowright, Billie Whitelaw, Peter Postlethwaite, Jane Horrocks. Directed by Jim O'Brien. 1989. Not rated.

(Capitol cassette, 92 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$79.95)

BY JOANNA LANGFIELD

Chances are you've not heard of this one, since it played in US theaters only in limited release. But it's a stunner.

Set in Liverpool in 1944, this story of three women begins as a deceptively simple and touching tale. Two sisters (one a seamstress, the other a widowed factory worker) take in their brother's teen-age daughter when her mother dies. The never-married dressmaker is content to live a strait-laced, intensely moral life, but her sister, remembering the passion that had once been a part of her life, is aching for more. And the young girl, blossoming in the insecurity of her first love affair with an American soldier, is caught in the tension between her two aunts. Just as it looks as if this could be nothing more than a lovely coming of age tale, the story twists and becomes surprisingly disturbing and hauntingly powerful.

Plowright (Olivier's widow) stars and once again gives a strong and memorable performance. Whitelaw, too, is very fine and Horrocks, as the melancholy teen, is a knockout. The story itself is special, and the production even more so—celebrating three top-notch actresses playing unforgettable women. (Capitol Video is at 4818 Yuma St. N.W., Washington, DC 20016.)

A NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET 5: THE DREAM CHILD ★★

Robert Englund, Lisa Wilcox, Kelly Jo Minter, Danny Hassel. Directed by Stephen Hopkins. 1989. Rated R.

(Media cassette, 90 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, \$89.95) □

BY ANDREW SARRIS

The *Nightmare on Elm Street* series has endured somewhat better than other slasher serials, such as *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th* or *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, partly because the subject of dreams allows greater imagination in the *mise en scene*. Also, dreams are a frighteningly psychic force that we can



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Dream date: Freddy turns five.

neither control nor escape in so-called "real life." We all dream—and much of the time we are afflicted with nightmares. There is, however, a downside as well. Since movies themselves are a form of dreaming, there is an increasingly tiresome duplication inherent in dreams within dreams.

For reasons best known to teenage screamers, Englund's Freddy the slasher has become something of a folk hero. Neither the actor nor the character happens to be my particular cup of gore, and in his latest manifestation in *A Nightmare on Elm Street 5* his mythic status seems more inexplicable than ever. This taste for indestructible monsters comes very close to devil worship among the young. Evil can never be overcome, Freddy seems to say, so sit back and enjoy it.

Ominously, Freddy stalks a pregnant young girl (Wilcox), whose boyfriend Freddy has dispatched to the hereafter. It seems he wants an heir to carry on his bloody work. The special-effects people have a field day pulling gooey substances out of blood-soaked wombs so as to satisfy the grossest appetites. But there is not all that much violence in a movie that seems preoccupied with the topical issues being debated nationwide by the pro-choice and pro-life forces. Fetal life is again becoming a gimmicky movie convention to play on the universal fears of pregnancy that accounted for so much of the popular success of *Rosemary's Baby* a couple of decades ago.

Ultimately, however, Freddy bounces

back too often from seeming obliteration to remain a credible menace. He seems to be able to do anything in or out of dreamland, including slashing the life out of a comic strip character—shades of the toons in *Roger Rabbit*. His powers have expanded since Wes Craven's original *Nightmare* a few years back. Now Freddy is on a par with Lucifer himself in challenging everything sacred and holy with his lowbrow, hillbilly-accented wisecracks.

There is still a lot of ambition in the series, but less and less real tension. The idea of a spunky heroine as a product of the woman's movement is losing its "relevance" to today's world. Young women should have something better to do than confront indestructible monsters.

Media is releasing *Nightmare 5* in both an R-rated and unrated version. I've only seen the former, but have been informed that the unrated version includes extended versions of scenes (about an additional minute's worth) that were considered too gory to qualify the movie for an R rating in its theatrical release. One shows Freddy feeding an anorexic girl to death; the other involves a motorcyclist being transformed into the machine itself.

SLEEPER OF THE MONTH

MIRACLE MILE ★★★

Anthony Edwards, Mare Winningham, Denise Crosby. Directed by Steve de Jarnatt. 1989. Rated R. (HBO cassette, 87 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.99) □

BY STEVE SIMELS

Miracle Mile is a nervy, audacious little movie, at once a nail-bitingly effective thriller and the best black comedy about impending nuclear doom since *Dr. Strangelove*. That last, of course, may explain why it died in theaters. Apparently, late '80s audiences like their Bomb movies unambiguously post-nuke apocalypse. But now that the Evil Empire is a has-been and former Cold War adversaries are pursuing disarmament, it wouldn't surprise me if *Miracle Mile* gets a commercial second chance in its video incarnation. It certainly deserves it.

The premise here is simple and effectively creepy: Average guy Edwards discovers that World War III has begun (though the government is saying nothing) and that he has an hour to get out of town before the missiles hit. His resulting odyssey through Los Angeles, as staged by writer-director de Jarnatt (and cinematographer Theo Van

de Sande, who gives the city a hauntingly desolate sci-fi quality) has something of the tone and look of Martin Scorsese's *After Hours*, but with the deadpan nightmare quotient upped considerably.

De Jarnatt, who previously gave us the misfire *Cherry 2000*, is almost totally in command of his material here. The picture unwinds as a calculated mixture of realism and stylization—a neon-lit, smog-bound homage to Hitchcock and Hieronymus Bosch that's only a slight exaggeration of every anti-LA joke you've ever heard. Visually, some of

Edwards: end of the road in LA.



this is close to breathtaking—a shot of ICBMs over the downtown skyline, for example. Even more impressive is the sure hand de Jarnatt demonstrates with his actors. Crosby, for instance, is perfect as a yuppie lawyer so driven that she speed-reads the Cliffs Notes to *Gravity's Rainbow*. De Jarnatt even coaxes an affecting performance out of aging B-horror veteran John Agar, an accomplishment I would have thought beyond the pale.

Miracle Mile is not perfect. The romance between Edwards and Winningham is undermotivated, the political issues (a US preemptive first strike) get short shrift, and occasionally the scenes of urban chaos reveal the limitations of the modest budget. Still, despite an ending that may strike some as unsatisfying, *Miracle Mile* registers as a virtuoso performance by a young director who clearly bears watching. In an era when most of his genre contemporaries aspire to nothing more than pointless Steadicam exercises, he's made a resolutely entertaining picture that actually has something on its mind. Meanwhile, HBO's tape transfer looks like a million bucks, and the Hi-Fi soundtrack lets you hear every nuance of Tangerine Dream's moody electronic music score.

Steve Simels also writes for Stereo Review and Rolling Stone.



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LA LECTRICE ★★

Miou-Miou, Christian Ruche, Regis Royer, Maria Casares, Patrick Chesnais. Directed by Michel Deville. 1989. Rated R. (Orion cassette, 98 min., Hi-Fi stereo, in French with English subtitles, \$79.98)

BY CLIVE BARNES

When the French are pretentious (culturally, that is), their pretensions are so often overlaid with a patina of literary awareness—even a simple sense of language—that such pretensions take on a life and validity of their own. Such may be the case with Deville's gently absurdist movie *La Lectrice* (The Reader).

The heroine Constance (played by Miou-Miou, a sweetly naive blond soubrette with deep eyes of mystery) likes to read to her lover in bed. When we meet her, she is reading from a novel by Raymond Jean, who, not so incidentally, wrote the original novel and stories upon which the screenplay is based.

The story she reads concerns Marie, a young lady who places an advertisement in the local newspaper and hires herself out as a professional reader in the quite delightful (and we see many of its delights) French town of Arles. Because this is (of course, what but?) a movie within a movie, Constance becomes Marie, playing out the largely amatory adventures that Marie encounters while pursuing the joys of reading aloud.

Her clientele includes a young paraplegic boy who likes Baudelaire and the sight of her bare knees; an immensely old general's widow who admires Karl Marx and searches for revolution; her maid, who has trouble with spider bites on her thigh; a businessman who needs sex therapy more than remedial reading; and a retired judge who enjoys special passages from the Marquis de Sade.

Unfortunately, the movie has style where its heart should be. It wanders along the byways of literature with rather more words than images. I missed the

movie's theatrical presentation, but would guess that on video it gains in that evocation of voyeuristic intimacy that seems the movie's prime asset. This is not a movie for everyone, but anyone fascinated by books and reading may find it an offbeat evening's rental.

LOCK UP ★★★

Sylvester Stallone, Donald Sutherland, Darlance Fluegel, Sonny Landham, John Amos. Directed by John Flynn. 1989. (IVE cassette, 115 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

BY DOUG BROD

Lock Up, a nice change of pace for star Stallone, adds absolutely nothing new to the venerable genre of the prison movie. That said, it's still an efficient, effective entertainment.

As a model prisoner who's the object of revenge by a warden with a grudge, Stallone is subject to a veritable compendium of big-house cliches: brutal assaults by despicable guards; a roach race; a mud-covered, full-contact football game; the threats of the cellblock bully (played perfectly by the truly frightening Landham); and corny introductions ("This is Hell. I'm going to give you the guided tour"). It's all capped with an extremely satisfying ending that has Stallone per-

Stallone: set up in *Lock Up*.



forming some inventive table-turning on his nemesis: a reptilian Sutherland, who vacillates between intense viciousness and camp, and is a lot of fun to watch. The rest of the cast (made up largely of unknowns) is also memorable, quite a feat in what is essentially a star vehicle.

Stallone himself does a creditable job as the set-up con. He's both authoritative and charismatic—you can see why he becomes the de facto leader of a prison clique. Stallone's enunciation of his lines may often be quite a bit off, but he seems not to care, which adds a certain immediateness and—dare I say—gritty realism to this decidedly macho fantasy. With this picture, director Flynn (who also helmed the excellent *Best Seller* and the underrated *Rolling Thunder*) joins Walter Hill and John McTiernan in the pantheon of contemporary action directors.

RENEGADES ★★

Keifer Sutherland, Lou Diamond Phillips, Jami Gertz. Directed by Jack Sholder. 1989. Rated R. (MCA cassette, 105 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95) □

BY JOANNA LANGFIELD

This high-concept spinoff of *Young Guns* should fare better at video stores than it did at moviehouses. The kids to whom this movie is directed didn't line up at theaters, but they'll probably enjoy renting it for an evening or two.

Director Sholder told me that, after *Young Guns*, Phillips and Sutherland had wanted to work together again. So this project was formed around them. That spirit of casual goodwill seems peculiar for an odd-couple action-thriller about a hip cop and a Native American who warily pair up to fight a mob. Still, the friendship between the two actors is the real star of this movie, for better or worse.

Phillips brings an honest dignity and sly humor to his role. I was particularly impressed by Sutherland, who maintains real weight in the flashy role of a driven undercover cop. Sholder (*The Hidden*) tries to keep the excitement level high with a phenomenal series of chase scenes. The best one is a lengthy and well-photographed car chase that takes place early in the picture.

Stunts aside, we can't help but feel separated from all the action. The movie is too cold, too calculated to really draw us in. And nobody's going to buy the two stars acting as if they don't really like each other. Their real-life relationship is the backbone of this movie, but perhaps its greatest weakness, too.

Joanna Langfield is a critic and commentator for LBS Movietime Radio Network and former ABC radio critic.

Clive Barnes is a critic for the New York Post and a former London Times critic.

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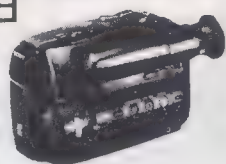
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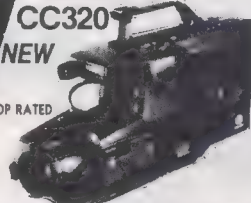
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ROAD HOUSE ★★★

Patrick Swayze, Kelly Lynch, Sam Elliott, Ben Gazzara. Directed by Rowdy Herrington. 1989. Rated R. (MGM/UA cassette, 114 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95) □

BY ED HULSE

Let's be blunt! *Road House* is corny, juvenile, exploitative, misogynistic, homophobic, brutally violent and just plain stupid. But I love it.

Actually, *Road House* is nothing more or less than an old-fashioned western with a contemporary setting. Swayze plays a well-known bouncer (legendary gun-fighter) "imported" to clean up a wild Missouri night club. He immediately runs afoul of Gazzara, the local mobster (ruthless cattle baron) and his employees (hired gunmen). Gazzara has designs on Lynch, the town's prettiest sawbones (schoolmarm). Outnumbered, if not outclassed, Swayze calls on Elliott, his grizzled mentor (aging legendary gun-fighter), to help him rout the bad guys.

Erstwhile Dirty Dancer Swayze deserves credit for being able to deliver his lines with a straight face. The script—which, among numerous bogus elements, characterizes him as a former philosophy major—hamstrings him with epigrammatic, pseudo-tough-guy dialogue that John Wayne would have choked on. But

Swayze grits his teeth and tries, to the best of his limited ability, to convince us that he believes the gibberish he's spouting.

Director Herrington, for his part, rates kudos for his imaginative staging of the action scenes, especially the barroom brawls (that's just what they are; no need to stretch the western metaphor). They're choreographed like dance routines, shot from all the right angles, and edited precisely for a perfect tempo.

Road House was almost unanimously trounced by the critics in its theatrical release and, by and large, deserved the brickbats. Its sexist and violent excesses are truly egregious by mainstream standards. It defies consideration as a "serious" movie. But properly approached, this raucous show offers plenty of entertainment, albeit of a particularly low nature.

A SINFUL LIFE ★

Anita Morris, Dennis Christopher, Blair Tefkin, Rick Overton. Directed by William Schreiner. Rated R. 1989. (RCA/Columbia cassette, 90 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$89.95)

Blowsy, titian-tressed dancer Claire Vin Blanc (Morris) hit her career high-water mark doing the frug on *The Sonny and Cher Show*; from there she went downhill. In fact, she hasn't worked in years. Now, a

meddlesome teacher who believes that Claire is an unfit mother wants to place her eccentric daughter, Baby (Tefkin), in a foster home. For Baby's sake, Claire tries to land a husband and gain respectability. Her two best bets aren't particularly inspiring: oversexed, slovenly Joe (Overton) and tight-laced, God-fearing Nathan (Christopher).

A Sinful Life, based on a play presented by LA's hip comedy troupe, the Groundlings, benefits enormously from the presence of Morris, a charismatic sex bomb whose torrid dance in the Broadway hit *Nine* some years ago was a star-making show stopper. In fact, as Claire, Morris seems to be kidding the image of her that *Nine* created via saucy posters and ads. She's a great natural comic, and her dialogue delivery, embellished by a silky-smooth Southern accent, makes the lines sound better than they are.

Morris labors mightily to overcome inherent script flaws, which include a constrained narrative that unfolds almost entirely within the walls of her dreary apartment. Furthermore, Christopher is seriously miscast as the zealot (a part he overplays), and an irritating, cutesy musical score sets the teeth on edge like fingernails on a chalkboard. As the end credits roll, one can't help but feel a lingering suspicion that a potentially funny movie died aborning. (E.H.)

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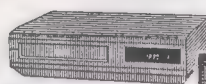
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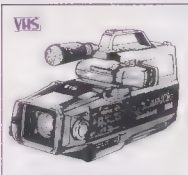
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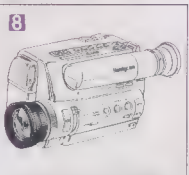
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THE RED DESERT ★★

Monica Vitti, Richard Harris. Directed by Michelangelo Antonioni. 1964. (Connoisseur cassette, 120 min., in Italian with English subtitles, Hi-Fi mono, \$79.95)

BY GLENN KENNY

Connoisseur continues to deliver long-overdue foreign gems to US video cineastes. Antonioni's first color feature details the spiritual and emotional crises experienced by a bourgeois wife (Vitti). Its then *au courant* theme of '60s alienation seems a bit dated today, yet in some ways the movie is more up to date than

ever—one of its minor themes is how man's pollution of the environment contributes to the increasing fragmentation of life.

The movie's first hour will separate the true believer from the dilettante—it's chock-full of the stuff that infuriated "I-like-a-picture-with-a-story" types during the flowering of the international *nouvelle vague*. Minimal, deliberately banal dialogue, long takes, zero plot development, an incongruous English-speaking actor (Harris) dropped into an otherwise

VR senior editor Glenn Kenny also writes for the Village Voice.

all Italian/French cast—that kind of thing. It's during the second hour that things get really interesting, with two amazing scenes: the depiction of a children's story that Vitti reads to her son, and Harris' emotionally violent seduction of Vitti. These place what little has gone before into stunning relief.

That said, I still feel that *Red Desert* today looks more like an experiment with ideas and techniques that Antonioni refined in better works such as *Blowup* and, especially, *The Passenger* (never mind the inexplicable *Zabriskie Point*). The attention Antonioni lavishes on the color schemes here isn't really as obvious as some critics once claimed; on the other hand, it's not always as effective as he presumably wanted it to be. Antonioni's depiction of the industrial wasteland anticipates such later works as *Eraserhead* and *Stalker*. Fans of those movies who don't mind seeing their sludge mixed with some good old European anomie would do well to check this one out for a rental.

Connoisseur's video version is particularly conscientious—the company completely resubtitled *Red Desert* for this release, and has retained its original aspect ratio through letterboxing.

LET'S DANCE ★

Fred Astaire, Betty Hutton, Roland Young. Directed by Norman Z. McLeod. 1950. (Paramount cassette, 112 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$14.95)

BY ROY HEMMING

Fred Astaire made so many great musicals in his time that I guess we can forgive him his few turkeys—of which, for me, this heads the list.

The biggest problem is that apparently nobody making the movie took the title seriously. Not only does the endless plot revolve primarily around the terminally bouncy Hutton and her problems trying to combine motherhood with a showbiz career, but the musical numbers, with one exception, are all substandard Astaire (especially a westernized easterners' spoof called "Oh Them Dudes").

But the exception alone is worth watching *Let's Dance* for. It's a dance solo to "Tiger Rag," in which Astaire dances around, under and on top of a baby grand (and some surrounding furniture) in that gravity-defying way he'd been polishing ever since the finale of *The Gay Divorcee* a decade and a half earlier—and doing it here, moreover, without any of the trick photography he would employ the following year in *Royal Wedding*. It remains the sort of number that assures Astaire's place as this century's unchallenged king of song-and-dance performers.



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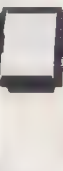
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A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN ★★★

Bosco Hogan, T.P. McKenna, John Gielgud. Directed by Joseph Strick. 1977. Not rated. (Mystic Fire cassette, 93 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$29.95)

BY JOHN R. QUAIN

It's an old saw—perhaps a toothless saw by now—that great literature falls like a ton of dusty tomes on a movie audience. An adaptation of James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* would seem more likely than most to suffer such a fate. Yet, under the reverential direction of

Strick (*The Balcony*, *Ulysses*), this screen version manages to retain as much of Joyce's language as one could hope for, without appearing awkward or strained.

With its peculiar vernacular and mix of politics and religion, Joyce's turn-of-the-century Ireland is not an easy setting to recreate—as John Huston's *The Dead* demonstrated. However, where Huston's visualization of that Joyce story often made me question the movie's period accuracy, I had no such moments of doubt with Strick's interpretation of *Portrait*.

VR associate editor John R. Quain writes regularly about movies and music.

Shot entirely in Ireland, the movie is as faithful as a 93-minute picture can be in its rendering of the original novel.

Stephen Daedalus (Hogan) grows up listening to talk about priests and politics at dinner. His father's miscalculations and the vagaries of life force the family on a downward economic spiral just as Stephen begins to realize the fruits of his writing. From his father, he turns to the Catholic Church, where Gielgud makes his brief appearance as the fire-and-brimstone-spewing priest whose homily incites Stephen to confess. Eventually, the artist rejects the domination of not only family and church, but of his country's swelling nationalism as well.

This cinematic effort follows director Strick's attempt 12 years earlier to condense Joyce's *Ulysses* into a movie—a condensation that earned the condemnation of many critics. With *Portrait*, Strick fares better in choosing a work much narrower in its psychological focus.

The image quality of this video transfer is good, with solid colors (neither too dark nor too washed out)—though the print does look a little worse for wear, and the soundtrack is a bit noisy but not disturbingly so. (Mystic Fire Video is at P.O. Box 1202, Montauk, NY 11954.)

EXQUISITE CORPSES ★★★

Gary Knox, Zoe Tamerlaine, Daniel Chapman. Directed by Temistocles Lopez. 1989. Not rated. (Monarch cassette, 100 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$79.95)

The rather mordant title of this independent production refers not to hapless victims in a slasher pic, but rather to a game once popular among members of the Dada art movement. (The game involved throwing incongruous elements together in an attempt to free the creative subconscious.) The reference has only a passing connection to this movie, which traces the fortunes (and misfortunes) of a tall, blond cowpoke from Tulsa who arrives in the chilly Big Apple, gets ripped off, encounters street punks, drug dealers, groping gay casting agents and beneficent squatters. Eventually, the out-of-towner develops the requisite New York "attitude" (cynicism) and becomes the star of an '80s downtown cabaret.

A cheesy, cheap, comedic curiosity, *Exquisite Corpses* does have its entertaining moments, particularly when it pokes fun at its own pretensions. It starts out in a tepid *Midnight Cowboy* fashion, but gradually throws in its own twists and turns—including a bisexual *menage a trois*, a murder and an international spy or two. The whole mass of incongruities is all in jest (hence the connection to the title). So, for a rental, one can overlook the raw production and slightly dark transfer for some offbeat fun. (J.R.Q.)

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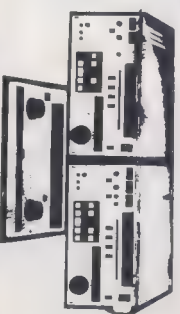
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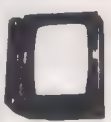
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THE BANKER ☼☼☼

Robert Forster, Duncan Regehr, Richard Roundtree, Jeff Conaway. Directed by William Webb. 1989. Rated R. (MCEG/Virgin cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 95 min., \$79.95)

This sleek 'n' sleazy thriller aims to hook your attention right from the get-go, with a graphic sex scene featuring gorgeous ex-Playmate Teri Weigel and large Regehr. It continues with a lot more nudity and some crossbow kills. Regehr plays a Trump-like tycoon by day/ritual murderer by night, who preys on call girls and has a Snow White jones—an interesting variation on a common theme, which is undermined (and made really entertaining) by some brilliantly bad dialogue. Aging veteran B star Forster has fun as the cranky cop on the case and, not unex-

pectedly, is beginning to resemble aged veteran B star Cameron Mitchell. As a pimp called Cowboy, Taxi's Conaway—himself a living-dead ringer for Keith Richards—does what he can('t) with lines like "Yer pullen muh chain, raht?" On the heels of his wacko spot in *Elvira*, Conaway has found another great resume builder. (Doug Brod)

BLACKOUT ☼☼

Gail O'Grady, Carol Lynley, Michael Keys Hall. Directed by Doug Adams. 1988. Rated R. (Magnum cassette, 90 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.98)

Caroline (O'Grady) has a bad memory: She can't remember her father, and she has vague recollections of some gory childhood trauma. Years later, after receiving a letter from long-lost Dad, she returns to Mom's (Lynley) orange grove. Dad's not home, but mean Mom is waiting with a rifle. The real mystery is how O'Grady came to star in this flick. Her ruler-flat, wooden-tongued performance nullifies what might otherwise have been an interesting movie. To be fair, director Adams' pointless, wandering shots of floorboards and stairs also contribute to the ennui. And there are continuity problems and gaffes aplenty, including a shower scene in which the actor is clearly wearing a bathing suit. *Blackout* is billed as "written by the author of *Psycho*" (Joseph Stefano). Unfortunately, it was not overseen by the director of *Psycho*. If Hitch had been behind the lens, he would've

made sure the suit didn't show—and he would've had O'Grady knifed in the very first scene. (John R. Quain)

I, MADMAN ☼☼☼

Jenny Wright, Clayton Rohner. Directed by Tibor Takacs. 1989. Rated R. (Media cassette, 90 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

In this modest, effective shocker, aspiring actress and horror-story aficionado Wright draws a connection between a series of grisly murders and the demented book she's reading. Her cop boyfriend Rohner doesn't think along the same lines, which makes things perilous for the girl when the killer starts pursuing her. *I, Madman* isn't without flaws—such as an overreliance on stock shock setups and an irritatingly bad overdub job—but it's refreshing to see a well-made chiller that doesn't fall into the routine stalk 'n' slash mold. Actually, with a slightly better script and some "names" in the cast, this one could have been a mainstream horror hit. So much so, in fact, that the gore scenes—presumably the drawing card for a video audience—seem superfluous. Wright makes an appealing heroine, though, and carries the movie over its rough spots. (Ed Hulse)



Hughes and Walsh vamp it up.

they're all pretty much the same. Dracula, or one of his disciples (Bond, in this one), grows weary of traipsing around and feeding on virgins, so he decides to woo a girl and settle down with her for all eternity. *To Die For*'s unlucky maiden is beautiful, successful real-estate agent Walsh, who doesn't quite know what to make of this stranger. The movie looks slick; it's well done technically and acted with more sincerity than the plot deserves. But, ultimately, it's just a time-killer. (Ed Hulse)

THUNDERGROUND ☼☼☼

Margaret Langrick, Paul Coufos. Directed by David Mitchell. 1989. Rated R. (SGE cassette, 92 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

The ridiculous title and twangy C&W tunes of this low-budget road movie made me sneer at first. Casey (Langrick), a con artist-hobo version of Rosalind from *As You Like It*, hooks up with Bird (Coufos), a dumber-than-Rocky, beefier-than-Norris pituitary case. Bird's a fighter, Casey's an opportunist. And so the betting starts. The only problem is that she's taking hundreds of dollars of bets from homeless indigents. But never mind—there's a good dose of bare-knuckle fighting to be had on the road to the ultimate big-money fight. Thus the partnership forms, with the requisite amount of sexual tension. Evenly directed and—egads!—well acted, *Thunderground* made me warm up to a story that should have left me reaching for a sweater. (John R. Quain)

SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT 3: BETTER WATCH OUT! ☼

Richard Beymer, Robert Culp. Directed by Monte Hellman. 1989. Rated R. (IVE cassette, 90 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

Here's a slasher movie that poses a not-exactly-burning question: What happens when you put the former

TO DIE FOR ☼☼

Steve Bond, Sydney Walsh, Brendan Hughes. Directed by Deran Sarafian. 1989. Rated R. (Academy cassette, 94 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$89.95)

The erotic vampire movie, which was a staple of French fright cinema in the '70s, has arrived on our shores with a vengeance: *To Die For* is, by my count, the fourth such opus to be released on video this year. Alas,

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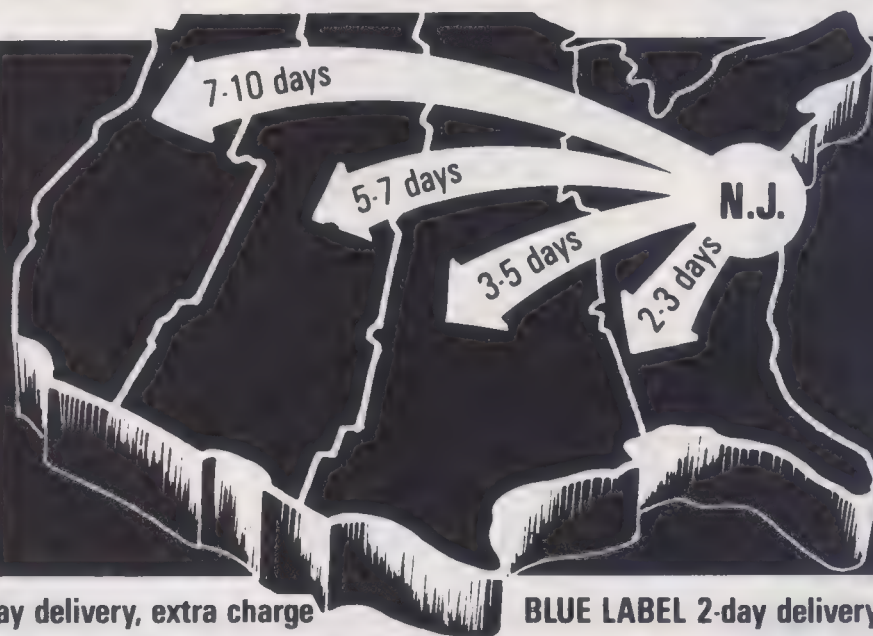
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CLASSICS

BROKEN BLOSSOMS ★★ ★★

Lillian Gish, Richard Barthelmess, Donald Crisp. Directed by D.W. Griffith. 1919. (HBO cassette, 94 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$39.99)

BY WILLIAM K. EVERSON

Broken Blossoms is almost as fragile a movie as its title. It's a piece of genuine screen poetry (one of the first) that



Blossoms' Gish: original beauty.

transcended its source material (a Thomas Burke short story, *The Chink and the Child*). Its impact can easily be destroyed by the wrong kind of presentation. For example, it needs the right projection speed or its pace becomes frenetic. Kevin Brownlow and David Gill, in transferring it to video, have achieved the right speed and it makes a tremendous difference.

William K. Everson is professor of film at New York University and The New School and the author of many books on movies.

The picture also needs its original color tints and tones. In black and white (as it has too often been shown), the poetry recedes and the melodrama takes over. (Color was used for mood and emotion as well as the obvious use of blue for night.) Working from a new 35mm print that came from a color negative (itself made from an original 35mm toned print), Brownlow and Gill were able to approximate its original visual beauty. But there is just no way that the richness and subtlety of old 35mm nitrate color can be totally recaptured. Still, this new HBO video version of *Broken Blossoms* is a good approximation of how it looked in 1919.

The music is a mixed blessing. Louis Gottschalk's original score has been reconstructed and glossed over a little in Carl Davis' arrangement, but it's still the original score. Students and historians will welcome it, and it's an excellent example of the live-orchestra scoring of its day. On the other hand, scoring in those pre-radio days was often not subtle, as most audiences were not musically sophisticated. Gottschalk's score for *Broken Blossoms* is frankly melodramatic, and actually sometimes lessens the effects Griffith was achieving. Nevertheless, Griffith supervised it, collaborated on it, and was happy with it.

A landmark in its day, *Broken Blossoms* was that comparative rarity: a movie that was innovative, an artistic success and a boxoffice smash, all in one. Barthelmess is stiff and none too convincing as the idealistic Oriental hero, but Gish is superb as the waif-heroine and her performance stands up to (and usually surpasses) all modern criteria. That she doesn't convince (in her mid-20s) as a 12-year-old hardly matters, since that aspect of her role is conveniently overlooked in the subtitling. Incidentally, this tape edition

offers a bonus in a lengthy introduction to the movie by Gish, filmed in London just a couple of years ago.

KING LEAR ★★ ★★

Laurence Olivier, Colin Blakely, Anna Calder-Marshall, John Hurt, Robert Lindsay, Leo McKern, Diana Rigg, Dorothy Tutin. Directed by Michael Elliott. 1984. (Kultur cassette, 158 min., Hi-Fi stereo, DS, \$29.95)

BY CLIVE BARNES

How can anything so wrong in so many respects turn out to be so basically right? This version of Shakespeare's *King Lear* is such a splendid record of a monumental performance by Olivier (the best of all his Shakespearean roles now immortalized on video) that it transcends all its blemishes, including Elliott's capable, rather than inspired, direction.

The difficulties with video Shakespeare



Olivier's Lear: incandescent.

are enormous. Put simply, they are much the same as those besetting video opera—achieving a style that accepts the stage conventions of the form, yet still employing the camera's searching eye to commanding effect. The compromises permitted here between movie realism and theatrical stylization prove very uneasy.

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Nor is Olivier's paper-rich supporting cast, assembled by Britain's Granada TV with tremendous care, quite as fine in practice as it should have been. There are exceptions—notably Hurt's whining Fool and Blakely's bluffly loyal Kent. But chiefly it is Olivier's show.

Oddly enough, Olivier's Lear on the stage (he only played it once, at the Old Vic in 1946, and I recall it well) was a failure (he was outacted by Alec Guinness' Fool). But here, by contrast, with age, refined with feeling, lean with passion, he fills our screens with the image of genius and the presence of greatness.

CASABLANCA ★★★★★

Humphrey Bogart, Ingrid Bergman, Paul Henreid, Claude Rains. Directed by Michael Curtiz. 1943. B&W. (Two Criterion Collection/Voyager CAV discs, 103 min., plus untimed supplementary material, digital and analog stereo soundtracks, with audio commentary on analog track, \$99.95)

BY ROY HEMMING

As time goes by, I must admit to being among those who find that *Casablanca* holds up better for repeat viewings than even *Gone with the Wind* or (yes, heresy be damned!) *Citizen Kane*. I've probably rewatched it, all the way through, more times than any of my nine other all-time favorite movies. Its fast-paced editing, ever-fascinating array of secondary characters, clever plot twists, and, of course, the remarkable chemistry between Bergman and Bogart combine to hook me every time.

But I was still unprepared for the genuine thrill I got watching this new laser disc edition. The print is extraordinary—transferred digitally from a 35mm archival nitrate, fine-grain master negative, with a digitally remastered soundtrack taken from an optical original. The folks at Criterion have earned all sorts of awards for their impressive work on other classics, and this disc ranks with their grade-A best.

Except for some newsreel footage of the real *Casablanca* in the early '40s, the supplementary disc materials are not as visually exciting as those on some other Criterion (they just weren't available in the archives, regrettably). But there are some intriguing production notes detailing the censorship problems Warner Bros. had with the Breen Office about the original script, and editing notes by producer Hal Wallis that reveal him to be as much *Casablanca*'s real auteur as director Curtiz. There's also a summary of a silly proposed sequel (understandably rejected

by Warner Bros.), the original theatrical trailer and, on one of the audio tracks, a *Lux Radio Theater* condensation of the movie, with Alan Ladd and Hedy Lamarr, that proves how incomparable Bogart and Bergman are. Best of all is the detailed running commentary by film historian (and *VR* reviewer) Ron Haver that accompanies the movie on Analog Track 2 and covers just about every conceivable tidbit about the planning, casting, making, editing and reception of the movie.

DARK SHADOWS VOLS. 1-4 ★★ ★

Jonathan Frid, Joan Bennett, Kathryn Leigh Scott. Directed by Lela Swift. 1966. B&W. (Four MPI cassettes, approx. 120 min. each, Hi-Fi mono, \$29.95 for Vol. 1, \$79.95 for a three-pack of Vols. 2-4)

BY JIM FARBER

In the late 1960s, the supernatural TV soap opera *Dark Shadows* was responsible for turning part of a generation of sweet-faced students into hell-bent Satanists, including yours truly. Every day I'd sprint home from school, leap in front of the TV set and gaze with rapt admiration as a bunch of vampires, witches and werewolves turned the world into a blood-caked column of evil. In reality, the daily show was far less scary or corrupt than the program which followed it, *The Dating Game*, but it had just enough outlaw spirit to rate as my first true vice.

In the two decades since, *Dark Shadows* has been glimpsed around the country only fitfully, through odd syndication deals. For its debut on video, MPI has chosen to synopsise the program's first year with a 15-minute overview on Vol. 1. That makes sense, since the show (which debuted on June 27, 1966) didn't move into full-force dementia until April 1967, when our vampire hero, Barnabas Collins, first appeared.

The rest of MPI's series offers eight hours' worth of complete shows in order, with five programs per tape. Since the show was shot live, there are enough flubs to make them indistinguishable at times from bloopers tapes. Despite such crudeness, the acting was generally quite good. The plots, while derivative, were still inventively refigured, and the dialogue, while often arch, could be witty. Robert Cole's terrific score needed no qualifications whatsoever.

MPI claims it will eventually issue all 1,225 episodes—which, by my math, would equal 245 tapes, for a cost of roughly \$7,500 for the whole set. That may sound like a dubious venture, but then, never underestimate the power of Satan.

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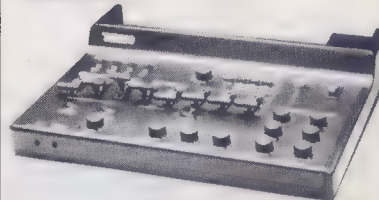
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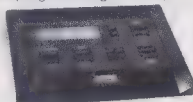
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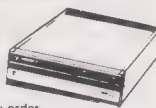


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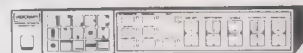
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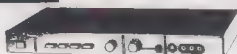


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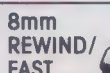
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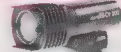


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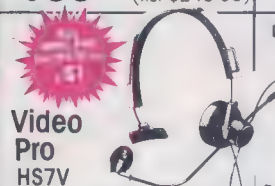
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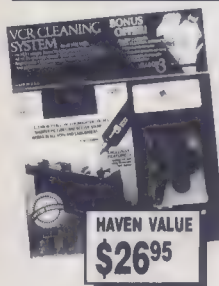
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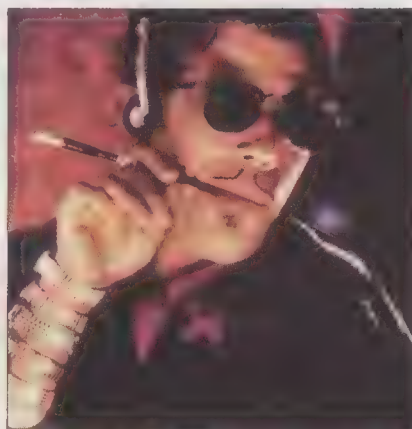
BIG TIME ★★ ★★

Tom Waits. Directed by Chris Blum.
1988. (Fries cassette, 87 min.,
Hi-Fi stereo, \$89.95)

BY JIM FARBER

The world Tom Waits creates on stage is a red-light district filled with wild and broken dreams. His look and sound suggest a garbage can full of ideas. There are berserk tarantellas, mad waltzes, sick rumbas and drunk Irish ballads rumbling around in his music—comprising a kind of psychotic's Top 40. Waits is just as alarming visually. With his mock-palsied demeanor and barfly outfits, backed by an elaborate, fleabag set, he comes off like the most witty/wise/terrifying street person imaginable.

Given the artful sleaze of the staging, it's no wonder *Big Time* (taped during Waits' 1987 tour and released in theaters in '88) rates as the performer's most dramatic piece. Problems arise, however,



Time waits for Tom Waits.

when director Blum tries to beef things up with theatrical bits of his own. Throughout Waits' performance, Blum intercuts intentionally crude scenes of the star playing a sort of usher/bookie, broken up by television static. The point is to extend the clutter and dislocation of the performance, but, unfortunately, most of these scenes come off as digressions.

The director is far more successful with his sonic impositions, tossing in various sounds of urban danger—sirens, gun blasts or car horns. In the world of Waits, these sounds are entirely redefined, communicating not just fear but a great humor as well. There's something funny and scary in the scene in which Waits garbles beat poetry while standing under an umbrella that's on fire.

Jim Farber is a critic and columnist for the New York Daily News and Rolling Stone.

What's more, there's beauty here as well—a feeling that Waits fully indulges for the ravishing finale, "Innocent When You Dream" (which features him singing standing fully clothed in a bathtub). By communicating these emotions simultaneously, Waits winds up with a unique worldview—a wry, accepting look at the tawdry ordinariness of all our lives.

NANCY WILSON AT CARNEGIE HALL ★★ ★

Nancy Wilson, Carl Anderson,
Orchestra conducted by Masahiko
Sato. Directed by Blaine Novak. 1989.
(V.I.E.W. cassette, 111 minutes, Hi-Fi
stereo, \$29.95)

BY RICH CONATY

When Nancy Wilson appeared at the 1987 JVC Jazz Festival in New York, some people grumbled that she seemed an inappropriate choice, particularly on a bill headlined by the venerable Joe Williams and the Count Basie Orchestra. That mattered little to thousands of Wilson devotees who assembled that night in Carnegie Hall—and it matters not at all now that Wilson's portion of the evening has been released on video.

Perhaps the jazz-fest setting dictated the breakneck tempo of the opening selection: the Kern-Mercer "Dearlly Beloved." Johnny Mercer's lyric deserves more of the attention that Wilson admirably lavishes on less worthy material later in the program. Four of the selections are from her then-new album, *Forbidden Lover*. Balladeer Carl Anderson, who sang on the album, joins Wilson for the title track and "First Time on a Ferris Wheel," an Anderson single. The balance of the 10 titles are of the "greatest hits" variety, including, as an encore, "How Glad I Am," which earned Wilson the 1964 Rhythm and Blues Grammy, despite formidable competition from Sam Cooke, Dionne Warwick and the Supremes.

Sonically, the string section doesn't stand a ghost of a chance against the assertive rhythm players. The stereo spread seems minimal. Wilson's voice, however, is well served, although at least one selection, "You Know," was redone after the concert.

The camerawork is a wee bit busy. Wilson seldom gets through one line of a song without a dissolve or two. This is less a reflection of the content of the performance than the director's overdone desire to be visually arresting. In spite of such flaws, this is a fine video record of the state of Nancy Wilson's art.

Rich Conaty is an assistant curator of New York's Museum of Broadcasting and the host of WFUV's The Big Broadcast.

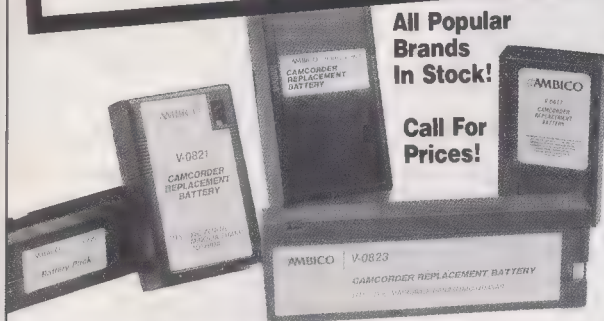
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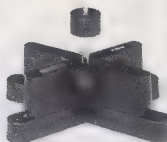
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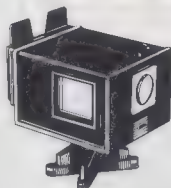
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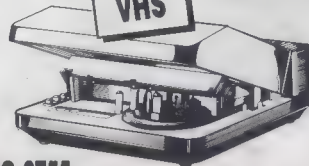
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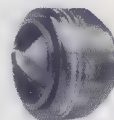
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THE ARTS

KLASSIX 13: MOZART, BEETHOVEN, SCHUBERT, BRAHMS ★★★

Balint Vazsonyi, Anthony Quayle.

Directed by Nicholas Vazsonyi. 1987.

(Four MPI cassettes, approx. 55 min. each, Hi-Fi stereo, \$24.95 each)

BY ALLAN KOZINN

Hungarian pianist Balint Vazsonyi is the spark plug behind this interesting new series of composer biographies that conquer most, although not all, of the problems inherent in condensing a prolific artist's life into an hour of video. With the late actor Quayle as a foil—playing a music lover who knows something of the great works but little of the men who wrote them—Vazsonyi offers a great deal of information in an easygoing, conversational way. There is, of course, lots of music, well performed, if fragmentary.

The four tapes stand on their own nicely, but they are clearly intended to be viewed chronologically as a set. Quayle and Vazsonyi (often together, sometimes on their own) visit the composers' houses

Allan Kozinn is a New York Times music critic and a contributor to *Keynote*, *Stage Bill* and other publications.

and other sites of significance—from taverns to graveyards in Bonn, Vienna, Hamburg and other places. They read from the composers' letters (Beethoven's soliloquy on his increasing deafness, for instance), from contemporary writings and, in some cases, from other works that inspired them (Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, again on the Beethoven tape).

Each tape takes a slightly different approach to its composer. The Mozart installment has some costumed dramatizations, as does the Brahms; these, fortunately, are fleeting touches rather than central elements. The Schubert tape is done particularly nicely: the dark, winding piano figure that opens "Der Leiermann" from *Winterreise* serves as a leit-motif; after some general introductory discussion, Vazsonyi and Quayle split up, one taking Schubert's life from his birth forward, the other from his death backward, offering a split focus that keeps things moving quickly.

There is some gorgeous footage here, and an entirely musical balance of movement and rest. There is some silliness too. Supporting the proposal that Beethoven was a visionary and that his music speaks to (and of) the future and about titanic power, a fragment of the Fifth Symphony is set to footage of a space shuttle launch; tornadoes and hurricanes are visual accompaniments to the "Eroica," and ex-

ploding volcanoes are matched to the Scherzo of the Ninth Symphony (an idea Stanley Kubrick explored to better effect in *A Clockwork Orange*).

The musical excerpts are not identified until the end of the tape—and then, regrettably, are not listed in the order of appearance, but by genre. Anyone attracted to a specific piece heard along the way will not always come away from these tapes knowing what to look for. Subtitles would have done wonders.

BRITTEN: WAR REQUIEM ★★★

Laurence Olivier, Nathaniel Parker,

Owen Teal. Directed by Derek Jarman.

1988. (London/PolyGram CLV disc, 89 min., CX stereo, ADD, \$34.95)

BY CHRISTIE BARTER

Just as a movie's musical soundtrack is written both to accompany and enhance the dramatic impact of what you see on the screen, so Jarman's visually eloquent treatment of Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem* serves here as an accompaniment to, and a forceful enhancement of, what is a powerful concert work to begin with.

The British director is not out to tell a story of men and women at war, but rather to elucidate (in the literal sense of that word) an acknowledged musical masterpiece that combines the liturgy of the Mass for the Dead with nine poems by the British poet Wilfred Owen, the leading poet-of-protest against World War I. The work is as strong a plea for brotherhood as any yet produced in musical terms—and Jarman's visuals match it brilliantly as an indictment of man's inhumanity to man and the suffering war produces.

There are characters named Wilfred Owen (played by Parker), the Unknown Soldier (Teal), the Old Soldier (Olivier) and others such as the Nurse, the Mother, the German Soldier and the Blinded Soldier. They move in a sort of mime depicting the horrors of the battlefield as well as the heroic fortitude of those who "also served" back home. Images reminiscent of the dark paintings of Goya are interlaced with actual wartime footage. Cumulatively, it all packs a terrific wallop.

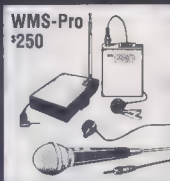
The musical track derives entirely from the splendid 1963 London/Decca audio recording of the *War Requiem* conducted by the composer himself, with soprano Galina Vishnevskaya, tenor Peter Pears and baritone Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. It, too, packs a wallop, benefiting here from digital remastering. My only complaint is the lack of a printed text (which the audio LP and tape have).

Christie Barter is the music editor of *Stereo Review* and former associate editor of *Musical America*.

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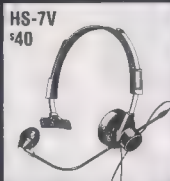
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OPERA FAVORITES WITH DOMINGO AND TE KANAWA ★★★

Plácido Domingo, Kiri Te Kanawa, Mirella Freni, Hermann Prey, Vladimir Atlantov, Agnes Baltsa. Directed by Humphrey Burton, Brian Large, John Vernon, Preben Montell. 1988 compilation. (HBO cassette, 59 min., Hi-Fi stereo, \$39.99)

BY ROY HEMMING

Opera purists may turn up their noses and disdain operatic "highlights" programs, but with the right performers and the right excerpts they can be effective in-

troductions to unfamiliar repertory or fascinating samplers of the work of specific singers in a variety of roles. This video album wins points on both counts. There are scenes taken from opera telecasts from London's Covent Garden, Milan's La Scala and the Arena di Verona in Italy. The six operas represented are, for the most part, not the best-known ones that the movies and TV usually fall back on, but those that both opera addicts and uninitiated newcomers can appreciate equally.

Tenor Domingo and soprano Te Kanawa possess, of course, two of the greatest voices in the world today—and, happily for the video age, they are also

two of the most photogenic of opera stars. Actually, they sing together in only one of the tape's six sequences: Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*. He appears with other co-stars in excerpts from *Ernani*, *Tales of Hoffmann* and *Girl of the Golden West*, and she with others in *Otello* and *Die Fledermaus* (with Domingo in the pit as conductor for that last one). Domingo's ringing ardor and passion dominate all his scenes, just as Te Kanawa's cooler eloquence reigns in hers. Most memorable: Te Kanawa's "Willow Song" from *Otello* and Domingo's *Hoffmann* arias.

Sound and camerawork are best in the four Covent Garden excerpts, and there are English subtitles for all the arias.

DOCUMENTARY

PORTRAIT OF AFRICA ★★★

Music by Vangelis, *Ladysmith Black Mambazo*, *Miriam Makeba*. Directed by Dann Moss. 1989. (Paramount cassette, Hi-Fi stereo, 56 min., \$29.95)

BY WILLIAM LIVINGSTONE

In most TV documentaries, the great beauty of Africa is overshadowed by the continent's environmental disasters and cosmic social problems. This videocassette, however, aims to please rather than to instruct. It consists of strong, beautiful images of Africa's plains and stark mountains, its harsh deserts contrasted with lush rivers, lakes and waterfalls. Africa's exotic fauna—camels, elephants, flamingos, giraffes, lions, monkeys, etc.—make cameo appearances.

As part of an ecosystem, man is shown in an intimate relationship with his surroundings. We see tribesmen and women engaged in the most basic human activities—tilling the soil, gathering firewood, fishing, making cloth and practicing their arts and crafts. They make it easy to believe that the wellsprings of human life were located in Africa.

The lack of narration strengthens the impact of the visual images, which are suitably underlined with New Age music by the synthesizer artist Vangelis, with interludes of authentic folksong. The sound quality is unusually good, with rather dramatic stereo separation.

It is, however, inaccurate to call this a portrait of Africa, since it was filmed only in Kenya and Tanzania, without a glimpse of South Africa or any of the countries of the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts. But viewed as simply a taste of Africa, it bears repeated watching.

William Livingstone is editor-at-large of Stereo Review.

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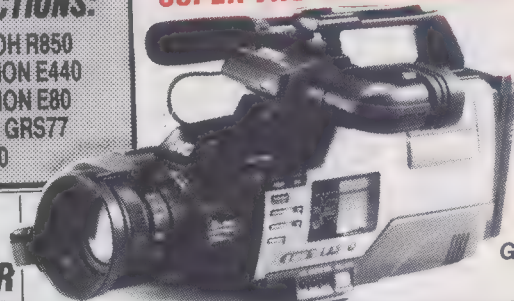
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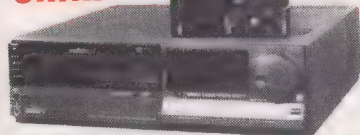
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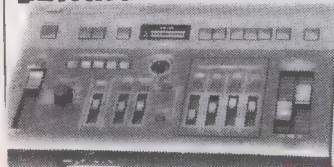
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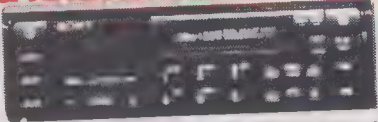
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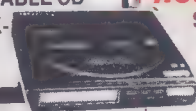


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CHAMPIONS FOREVER ★★★

Muhammad Ali, George Foreman, Joe Frazier, Larry Holmes, Ken Norton. Directed by Dimitri Logothetis. 1989. (J2 cassette, 90 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$19.95)

BY PAUL TAUBLIEB

This tape engrossingly recounts the lives and careers of five of the greatest heavyweights in boxing history. But the commanding and charismatic Muhammad Ali dominates. Ultimately, this is his

story, with the other fighters—Foreman, Frazier, Holmes and Norton—a colorful cast of legendary, but lesser, characters. Ali, both in his day and on this tape, was always the leading man.

We meet the fighters all sitting in a semicircle, being interviewed by former baseball star Reggie Jackson. Their words are intercut with extensive clips from the fights. Their recollections are fascinating for any fight aficionado—from Foreman describing his getting his break in life

Paul Taublieb is a columnist for Copley News Service and a serious fan of the sweet science.

from the Head Start anti-poverty program to Frazier subtly expressing his lingering envy and disdain for Ali.

But it is in retelling the Ali story, in his own words today plus extensive newsreel footage, that this tape becomes truly compelling. Even my girlfriend, who has always thought of boxing as brutish and primitive, became engrossed in Ali's saga. As sad as it is to watch him mumble as he speaks during the interview with Jackson (the effects of Parkinson's disease), it is equally inspiring to see the arc of his career, both as a man and an athlete: taking on the media and Sonny Liston with his lightning quick wit, jabs and right cross; his rise to stardom; his losing the title for refusing to be drafted for the Vietnam War; and, finally, his retribution in regaining his title.

Whether or not you're a devotee to the world of the squared circle, you can't help but enjoy this tribute to the sport and the man known as "The Greatest."

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COOKING

THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF PASTA ★★★

Margaret and Franco Romagnoli. No
director credited. 1989. (Videocraft
Classics cassette, 72 min., Hi-Fi
mono, \$42.45)

BY GENEVIEVE A. KAZDIN

If you've ever struggled to make pasta from a cookbook recipe, you'll revel in the ease with which the Romagnolis prepare basic linguini, fettucini, spaghetti and other pasta shapes. They demonstrate traditional methods as well as the use of food processors and rollers. And they make it so simple.

Once you have the pasta (and, of course, you may use any of the available commercial brands) you will want a sauce for it. Here again the Romagnolis make it easy. From basic tomato sauces to chic "designer" sauces, most can be prepared while the pasta is cooking.

All of the recipes are printed on the screen in easy-to-read white on black, with adequate time allowed for copying. The camera shows exactly what to do, and the Romagnolis also offer all sorts of helpful hints (such as the tip that a carrot is better than sugar for cutting tomato acid).

Those who remember the Romagnolis' PBS series know how well they work together. The pleasure they take in cooking is evident in Franco's deft movements and Margaret's glee in showing us how to use 20th-century appliances to create centuries-old favorites. (Videocraft Classics is at P.O. Box 8529, FDR Station, New York, NY 10150.)

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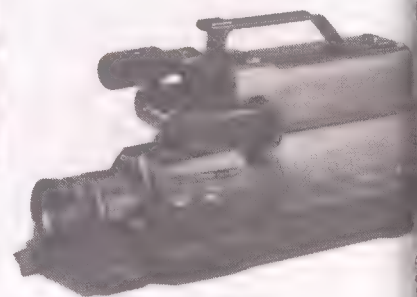
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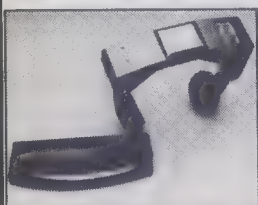
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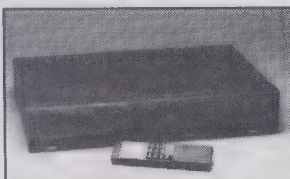
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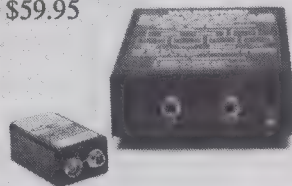


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SQUIGGLES, DOTS AND LINES ★★★★★

Ed Emberley. Directed by Karen Tucker and Jane Murphy. 1989. (KidVidz cassette, 25 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$14.95)

BY GENEVIEVE A. KAZDIN

Some time ago, Emberley developed what he calls a "drawing alphabet"—a system of six symbols that can be combined to draw almost anything. His many books are long-time children's favorites. Not only are they fun, but they also offer more creative challenges than ordinary coloring books.

Now Emberley's alphabet is available on videocassette as an entertaining, appealing program, featuring a crew of average kids who use his system for a variety of creative projects, from decorating sugar cookies to personalizing greeting cards.

It's an easy system to master. Even four- or five-year-olds will get the hang of it. It isn't a formula resulting in identical pictures from each user. Rather, it's a method that allows individual creativity to flourish.

Emberley offers an excellent, non-pressured way to help children explore color and shape, creating their own artistic impressions and integrating the power of observation into their lives.

PETER ALSOP'S COSTUME PARTY ★★★★★

Peter Alsop. Directed by Phyllis Coffey. 1988. (Moose School cassette, 45 min., Hi-Fi mono, \$19.95)

Alsop has had a long career in educational psychology, as well as a long career as a children's entertainer. His record albums have won many awards. He's different. Sure, he stands there, guitar in hand, and sings to a live audience of kids (in this case, a group in costumes at an outdoor concert in Topanga).

Just another kiddie show? No way. Alsop's original songs aim to encourage self-esteem, open-mindedness, understanding and healthy attitudes about self-protection, substance abuse and intrafamily power issues.

Too heavy? Too serious? Again, not at all. The music is tuneful and easy to sing. (It would be easier if a lyric sheet were enclosed.) Alsop has a comfortable touch with the crowd, and the kids who join him on stage are terrific.

This is a fun program to watch—with lots of eye appeal. It's a lively sing-along, but with some important things to say. (Moose School Productions is at P.O. Box 960, Topanga, CA 90290.) (G.A.K.)

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P R E V I E W S

ACTION

KING SOLOMON'S MINES (1950) Machete-equipped diamond fanciers Stewart Granger, Deborah Kerr and Richard Carlson prune Africa. (MGM/UA, Dec. 5)

HAWKEN'S BREED (1987) Hawken (Peter Fonda), hot for a recent widow, helps track her family's killers. Rated R. (Vidmark, Dec. 27)

HIGH STAKES (1989) Stockbroker Robert Lupone engages Sally Kirkland's pimp in mortal gambits. Rated R. (Vidmark, Jan. 3)

HOSTILE TAKEOVER (1989) Mild-mannered office worker David Warner snaps, arms and takes hostages. Rated R. (IVE, Jan. 25)

JAKARTA (1989) Ex-CIA agent Christopher Noth lives there, dangerously. Blood spills, bullets fly and Sue Francis Pai screams. Rated R. (MCEG/Virgin, Jan. 3)



"Sorry, Mr. Bond, but your Licence has expired."

LICENCE TO KILL (1989) In his 16th movie, 007 (now Timothy Dalton) goes after vicious South American druglords. Rated PG-13. (CBS/Fox, Jan. 4)

THE LOST PLATOON (1989) WWII vet discovers that those real tough guys were vampires. With David Perry. Rated R. (AIP, Dec. 20)

NASHVILLE BEAT (1989) Knife-wielding gangs invade Nashville, but so do *Adam-12*'s Martin Milner and Kent McCord. Protection and servitude follow. (NAC, Dec. 1)

OBSESSED (1988) Crime victim Kerrie Keene sure is, and she wants vengeance, vengeance, vengeance. Alan Thicke co-stars. Rated PG-13. (New Star, Dec. 13)

PINK CADILLAC (1989) Bounty hunter Clint Eastwood nabs bail jumper Bernadette Peters and the titular wheels, but inherits neo-Nazis. Rated PG-13. (Warner, Jan. 10)

TIME TROOPERS (1987) Duty forces a post-Armageddon cop to off his favorite gal. Albert Fortell and Hannelore Elsner deal with bad karma. Rated R. (Prism, Jan. 4)

COMEDY

BLACK ADDER III (1989) Early 19th-century English nobleman endures demotion to man's man. With Rowan Atkinson. From the BBC. (CBS/Fox, Dec. 14)

A CHORUS OF DISAPPROVAL (1989) Shy widower Jeremy Irons stumbles upon lust and wealth in community theater. With Anthony Hopkins. Rated R. (South Gate, Jan. 4)

HI-DI-HI (1988) A Cambridge professor turns Anglo borscht-belt camp

entertainment director. From the BBC. (CBS/Fox, Dec. 14)

HOW TO MURDER YOUR WIFE (1965) Drunken bachelor Jack Lemmon wakes up wed to Verna Lisi, then explores the title's possibilities. (MGM/UA, Dec. 5)

OPEN ALL HOURS (1983) Tightwad Ronnie Barker (*The Two Ronnies*) runs an overstocked corner shop. From the BBC. (CBS/Fox, Dec. 14)

UHF (1989) "Weird Al" Yankovic gets to run a TV station. *Wheel of Fish* and other parodies follow. Rated PG-13. (Orion, Jan. 25)

HORROR

DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE (1932) Fredric March's Oscar-



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winning portrayal of Robert Louis Stevenson's schizoid physician. B&W. (MGM/UA, Dec. 5)

DRAMA

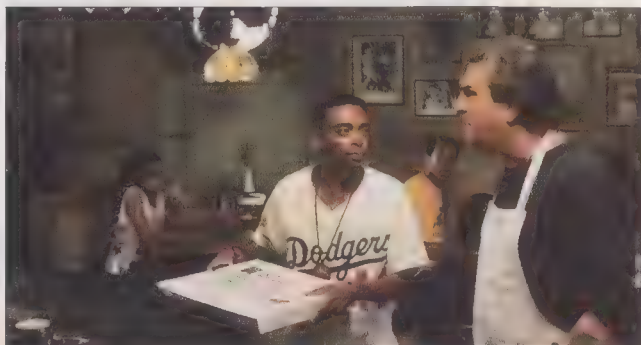
ALEXA... A PROSTITUTE'S OWN STORY (1989) When a young playwright opens the curtain on Alexa's heart o' gold, her pimp sends in the hook. With Christine Moore. Rated R. (Academy, Jan. 4)

THE BALCONY (1963) Leonard Nimoy and Peter Falk discuss the revolution in Shelley Winters' brothel. From Jean Genet's play. (*Mystic Fire*, Dec. 1)

THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE (1955) Rotten kids whittle away at teacher's patience. With Glenn Ford, Vic Morrow, Sidney Poitier. B&W. (MGM/UA, Dec. 5)

BREAKING POINT (1989) Nazi fiends try to trick captive Corbin Bernsen into revealing the Allies' D-Day plans. With Joanna Pacula. (Turner, Dec. 1)

DO THE RIGHT THING (1989) Director Spike Lee foments a racial incident in a Brooklyn neighborhood.



Can Lee and Aiello Do the Right Thing?

With Danny Aiello. Rated R. (MCA, Jan. 14)

FORBIDDEN SUN (1989) Lauren Hutton runs a spooky gymnastics camp on Crete where the rock bands and Minotaur play. With Renee Estevez. Rated R. (Academy, Jan. 11)

JULIUS CAESAR (1953) The Shakespearean play about Sid's Roman ancestor. With Marlon Brando, John Gielgud, Deborah Kerr. B&W. (MGM/UA, Dec. 5)

THE KILLING (1956) Director Stanley Kubrick plots a racetrack heist. Sterling Hayden, Elisha Cook and Timothy Carey synchronize watches. B&W. (MGM/UA, Dec. 5)

SIGNS OF LIFE (1989) Sudden angst wakes a sleepy Northeastern fishing village. With Beau Bridges, Vincent D'Onofrio. Rated PG-13. (IVE, Jan. 11)

SWEET BIRD OF YOUTH (1962) An ex-movie queen's gigolo (Paul Newman) runs afoul of his new girl's powerful dad. From the Tennessee Williams play. With Geraldine Page, Shirley Knight. (MGM/UA, Dec. 5)

VIETNAM STORY III (1989) Depictions of personal experiences during the Southeast Asian conflict. From HBO cable. (HBO, Dec. 6)

SUSPENSE

BLOOD RELATIVES (1981) A dirty secret is kept all in the family. With Donald Sutherland. Directed by Claude Chabrol. Rated R. (UAV, Jan. 15)

BUYING TIME (1989) Criminal kids collide with creepy cops and psychotic thugs. With Dean Stockwell, Jeff Schultz. Rated R. (CBS/Fox, Dec. 14)

CUTTING CLASS (1989) Handsome high-schoolers drop in a roar of

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power tools as Roddy McDowell and Martin Mull consume the scenery. Rated R. (*Republic*, Dec. 13)

DANGEROUS OBSESSION (1988) Nasty Corrine Clery kidnaps the MD who malpracticed her beau to oblivion. Directed by Lucio (*Zombie*) Fulci. Rated R. (*AIP*, Dec. 20)

DIAL HELP (1989) Erotically inclined demons reach out and touch model Charlotte Lewis, then hang up on her friends. Directed by Ruggero (*Cannibal Holocaust*) Deodato. Rated R. (*Prism*, Dec. 21)

MESMERIZED (1986) Weird John Lithgow keeps Jodie Foster locked in a loveless marital hell. Rated PG. Also with Michael Murphy, Dan Shor. (*Vestron*, Dec. 6)

STAMP OF A KILLER (1989) It's the unique MX missile-plans commemorative edition, and Judith Light's boy has it. Jimmy Smits fends off spies. (*New World*, Dec. 12)

A WOMAN OBSESSED (1989) Loony painter/mom mistakes long-lost son for her fave model, Dad. Confused in-law Linda Blair dodges vitriol. Rated R. (*Academy*, Jan. 4)

ANTHOLOGY
NEW YORK STORIES (1989) A trio of short movies by Gotham directors: Woody Allen's comedic *Oedipus Wrecks*, Francis Coppola's poor-little-



NY Stories' Nolte: portrait of a tortured soul.

rich-girl variant, *Life Without Zoe* and Martin Scorsese's ode to a tortured artist (with Nick Nolte), *Life Lessons*. Rated PG. (*Touchstone*, Jan. 24)

BIODRAMA
BOYS TOWN (1938) Father Flanagan founds a boys' reform school. With Spencer Tracy, Mickey Rooney. B&W. (*MGM/UA*, Dec. 5)

LUST FOR LIFE (1956) Kirk Douglas as painter Vincent Van Gogh, Anthony Quinn as painter Gauguin and MGM's backlot as 19th-century Paris. (*MGM/UA*, Dec. 5)

MOULIN ROUGE (1952) Jose Ferrer as painter Toulouse-Lautrec and

MGM's backlot again as 19th-century Paris. With Zsa-Zsa Gabor and Peter Cushing. (*MGM/UA*, Dec. 5)

MUSIC
HARD 'N' HEAVY: VOL. 4 (1989) Aerosmith, Vixen, the uncensored version of Danzig's "Mother" clip and (yipes) more! (*MPI*, Dec. 1)

VINTAGE TV
HONEYBLOOPERS (1950s) An hour of *Honeymooners* misfires. With Jackie Gleason, Joyce Randolph, Art Carney. B&W. (*MPI*, Dec. 1)

HONEYMOONERS GREATEST BATTLES (1950s) A veritable pantheon of domestic sitcom squabbling.

With Jackie Gleason, Audrey Meadows. B&W. (*MPI*, Dec. 1)

RALPH KRAMDEN'S GREATEST SCHEMES (1950s) Jackie Gleason as the hopeless confidence man. B&W. (*MPI*, Dec. 1)

DOCUMENTARY
BILL MOYERS' WORLD OF IDEAS (1988) The commentator/journalist explores *The National Soul*, *Crisis of Democracy* and *Dissolving Boundaries* in three 90-minute tapes. (*Mystic Fire*, Dec. 1)

HEAVY PETTING (1989) Clips from 1950s' government-produced moral guidance flicks intercut with celebs' recollections. With David Byrne, Spalding Gray, Sandra Bernhard. (*Academy*, Jan. 4)

EXPOSURES
1990 PLAYMATE CALENDAR (1989) A 75-minute romp. (*HBO*, Dec. 1)

PLAYBOY VIDEO CENTERFOLD: PEGGY MCINTAGGART (1989) Miss January 1990 discusses her Canadian upbringing. (*HBO*, Dec. 1)

FITNESS
BODY AND MIND: TOTAL RELAXATION AND STRESS RELIEF PROGRAM (1989) Raquel Welch and Dr. Joan Borysenko Ph.D. calm the nervous. (*HBO*, Dec. 26)

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TEST REPORTS



SUMMARY

Hitachi Monitor/Receiver, Model CU5000K

If you're looking for a big-screen set for the centerpiece of your home theater system, this set from Hitachi's UltraVision line offers a bright, 50-inch (measured diagonally) picture, with three types of surround sound to boot. At \$3,600, such features don't come cheap, but our tests revealed that Hitachi's rear-projection CU5000K puts out a picture comparable to the top-ranking projection TVs on the market.

APEL's tests revealed outstanding picture detail, with extended video frequency response delivering 800 lines of horizontal resolution. Interlace on this rear-projection set was perfect, and the color quality excellent. As for the luminance (brightness) rating, though our tests rendered a lower—but still fine—number than the company's stated specifications, the discrepancy is the result of different testing procedures. (APEL's tests attempt to simulate typical viewing conditions as closely as possible.)

Naturally, if you want a big set, you'll also want big sound, and the CU5000K comes with a built-in MTS (multichannel television sound) decoder, as well as surround sound. All this, together with a fine tuner, makes Hitachi's CU5000K a big screen worth watching—and hearing.



FEATURES

Aside from the whopping 50-inch picture this set offers, additional picture enhancement circuits include a notch filter and dynamic noise reducer. Such features have now become *de rigueur* on top-of-the-line monitor/receivers. (It should be noted that for the test results section, all measurements were performed with these two features switched off.)

In addition to its MTS decoder and Dolby Surround circuitry, the CU5000K includes hall and matrix surround. Unlike Dolby, these two approaches do not require a pair of extra speakers (in addition to the two up front).

A learning remote is supplied by Hitachi with the CU5000K. The remote is preset to operate Hitachi VCRs and can be programmed to operate other infrared remote-controlled equipment. It can also be used to move through the set's eight separate on-screen menu displays, which include adjustment of picture and sound parameters, auto-channel programming and channel lockout (so parents can prevent their children from watching particular stations).

The back of the CU5000K has a full array of audio/video inputs and outputs, including S-video connectors. The front panel can accommodate S-video stereo inputs from, for example, a camcorder.

CONTROLS

Beneath the giant screen of this set is a row of controls and pushbuttons. Starting at the right are the power switch and indicator lights for power, stereo reception and SAP (second audio program) reception.

Toward the left, a flip-down panel hides channel up/down and volume buttons, as well as a function button for selecting the desired inputs and outputs. A "P Mode" control brings up on-screen menus for audio and surround sound adjustments, and a menu button displays menus for adjusting station memorization, date and time settings, program listings, the off-timer setting and channel lockout.

In addition, there are antenna and S-video selection buttons, and a pushbutton for displaying a test pattern in order to make picture adjustments. The supplied remote

duplicates all of the aforementioned functions, and allows direct channel access or recall of the last channel viewed.

TEST RESULTS

As measured by APEL, maximum usable luminance from this rear-projection TV set was 155 footlamberts. As mentioned earlier, this differs from Hitachi's rated 460 footlamberts, but is accounted for by the fact that the company measures this value using



Fig. 1. Fringe-area reception: very good.

a 2%, 100 IRE window pattern (the "window" being the space through which the measurement is made), with the picture and black level controls at maximum. APEL uses a 36.5%, 100 IRE window pattern, which we feel more closely simulates realistic viewing conditions.

Nevertheless, however you measure it, picture brightness is more than adequate—providing you sit in front of the screen at the proper height, relative to its center. While horizontal movement away from center screen can be tolerated, vertical movement—such as standing up—results in a significant reduction in perceived brightness. This is especially true if you are closer than 10 feet from the screen. Such viewing angle discrepancies, though, are a consideration with all rear-projection sets.

With its big, 50-inch screen, snow or noise resulting from weak signal reception would be particularly annoying. Fortunately, the TV tuner on the CU5000K is sensitive

enough to pull in a watchable picture, even under fringe-area conditions (Fig. 1).

Audio frequency response was ruler-flat over the entire audible range (20 Hz to 20 kHz). Hitachi also seems to have done a good job aligning the decoder section; the built-in MTS decoder delivered good stereo separation in excess of 28 dB. This should give you a full stereo sound along with the big picture.

As more and more people set up home entertainment systems, sets such as this Hitachi rear-projection TV are likely to become more popular than ever. Until recently, rear-projection sets were not major players in the video arena. That was generally due to the fact that the earliest sets of this size required darkened rooms for optimum viewing, and because picture clarity left something to be desired. That is no longer the case, as evidenced by the superb picture and good sound delivered by this fine example from Hitachi.

—Len Feldman

LAB MEASUREMENTS:

Hitachi Monitor/Receiver

Model Number: CU5000K

Serial Number: W9H000142

VIDEO SECTION

MAXIMUM USABLE LUMINANCE	155 Footlamberts
RESOLUTION (horizontal/vertical)	800/500 Lines
CONVERGENCE (center/corners)	0/.25%
VIDEO FREQUENCY RESPONSE	10.0 MHz
INTERLACE	50/50
TRANSIENT RESPONSE	Very Good
BLACK LEVEL RETENTION	100%
COLOR QUALITY	Excellent

Color Quality



AMPLIFIER SECTION

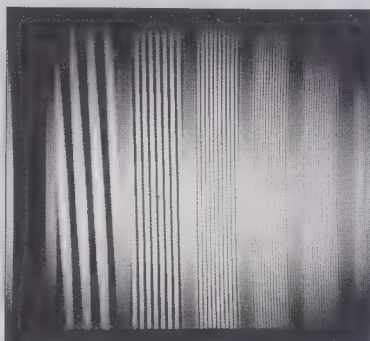
MAXIMUM OUTPUT Audio Output	2.40 Volts
TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION (1 kHz, at -10 dB) Audio Output	.04%
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO (A-weighted) Audio Output	82.7 dB
FREQUENCY RESPONSE Audio Output	20 Hz to 20 kHz

AUDIO SECTION

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

(at 1,000 uV, A-weighted)	
Stereo (left/right)	55.6/55.8 dB
SAP	59.0 dB
Mono	55.5 dB

Frequency Response



TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION

(at 1 kHz, -20 dB)	
Stereo (left/right)	.23/.25%
SAP	.30%
Mono	.33%

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

(at -20 dB, 100% modulation)	
Stereo	25 Hz to 12.6 kHz
SAP	20 Hz to 4.8 kHz
Mono	23 Hz to 3.0 kHz

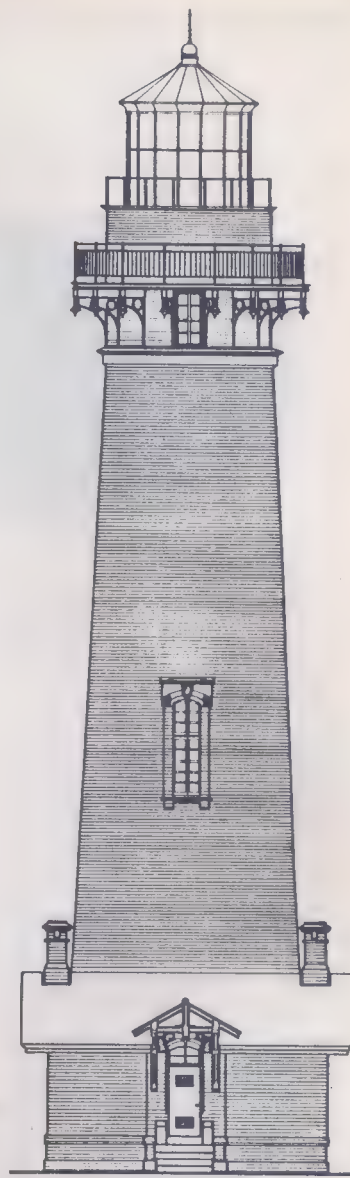
CHANNEL SEPARATION

(at 1 kHz, 100%/-20 dB, 100% modulation)	
Left Channel	28.5/28.8 dB
Right Channel	28.3/28.8 dB

ADDITIONAL DATA

PICTURE SIZE	50 Inches (diag.)
POWER REQUIREMENTS	200 Watts
DIMENSIONS (HxWxD, in inches)	53x45³/₄x27¹/₂
WEIGHT	242 Pounds
SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE	\$3,600

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).



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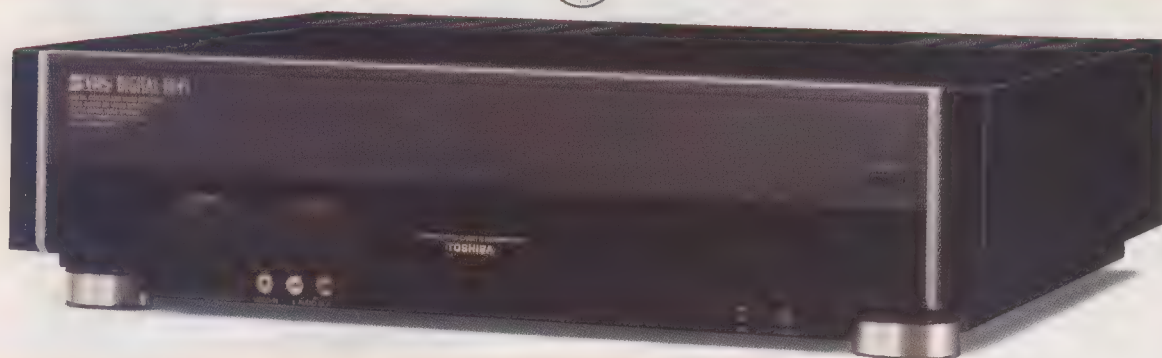
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TEST REPORTS



S U M M A R Y

Toshiba S-VHS VCR, Model SV-F990

After a number of hands-on evaluations of this exciting VCR (see "Better by Design," June '89 VR and "Hands On," July '89 VR), we finally got the opportunity to perform a full lab test on the deck. While the performance of our test deck didn't distinguish the SV-F990 as the very best S-VHS VCR we've seen, we're still extremely impressed with this model. The abundance and versatility of its features still speak volumes. (Speaking of volumes, the SV-F990 comes with two separate owner's manuals—one for regular operation of the deck, and another explaining the various digital special effects.) The deck's built-in color fader, digital superimposer, character generator, video scanner and more are all real eye-openers. The deck's synchro-edit capabilities (detailed in the aforementioned "Hands-On") are essential for the home moviemaker. And while the picture quality here wasn't the utmost, it was still very good, and the digital noise reduction circuitry of the deck helps make it better still (see below).

Suffice it to say that this deck has just about everything a videographer would want for transforming his or her raw camcorder footage into something special. Beyond that, its programming capabilities render it perfectly suited for time-shifting, its indexing features make access to different programs easy and quick, and its built-in MTS decoder was one of the best we've ever tested—boasting outstanding frequency response and stereo separation close to 40 dB.

In the past few months we've seen a number of really terrific decks geared for serious video enthusiasts. Recent S-VHS models from JVC and Panasonic have pretty much redefined the state of the art. Toshiba's SV-F990 clearly belongs in a select pantheon with those other groundbreaking decks.

FEATURES

As with a number of other such feature-laden VCRs, the functions of this deck can be divided into two categories: digital and non-digital. Among the latter are such convenience features as index search, skip search, address search (for which you punch in the desired counter number and the tape zips to that spot), picture search and time search. On-screen displays show date and time and also confirm timer programming information and aid in editing. (The timer can handle eight events over two weeks.) Non-digital effects also include fast-forward or reverse picture search, slow-motion playback and frame-by-frame viewing. A jog/shuttle wheel on the remote control

switches between various special playback functions, such as wipes and fades.

Synchro editing can be performed with another VCR that has a similar synchro-edit terminal. Even without that facility, this VCR makes manual insert or assembly editing to or from another VCR very easy and convenient.

As for the digital special effects, there are no fewer than 11, and the various combinations they offer add up to a potpourri of exciting touches you can add to your home video productions. The image scanner that hooks up to the deck lets you pick up printed graphics and put them over your video picture. This function is similar to, yet separate from, the digital superimposer. With both

features, once you've got the picture or title you want, you can manipulate it in a number of ways, changing color, position and size. (And if these features don't appeal to you, there's a built-in character generator as well.) There are also shading effects, strobe, negative/positive image, fade and color correction. The last can be very important, particularly if your original footage suffers from incorrect white balance; you can use the color corrector feature to simulate the "right" color tones.

Let us not forget the deck's cable-compatible tuner, FM simulcast recording

LAB MEASUREMENTS:

Toshiba S-VHS VCR

Model Number: **SV-F990**

Serial Number: **60209087**

VIDEO SECTION

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

Video Output	
SP (at 4.20 MHz)	-5.42 dB
SP (at 5 MHz)	-10.9 dB

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS

Red-Field Chroma (video output)	
SP (AM/PM)	39.9/37.5 dB
Luminance (video output)	
SP (100/50/10 IRE)	42.8/41.6/43.5 dB

AUDIO SECTION

OUTPUT LEVEL

Conventional	.40 Volts
Hi-Fi	2.70 Volts

THD AT REFERENCED OUTPUT

Conventional	1.60%
Hi-Fi	2.30%

WEIGHTED PEAK FLUTTER (DIN)

Conventional (avg/peak)	.450/.550%
Hi-Fi (avg/peak)	.020/.022%

FREQUENCY RESPONSE (for -3 dB)

Conventional	66 Hz to 12.2 kHz
Hi-Fi	20 Hz to 20 kHz

HARMONIC DISTORTION (at -10 dB)

Conventional (100 Hz/1 kHz)	.61/.28%
Hi-Fi (100 Hz/1 kHz/5 kHz)	.16/.10/.18%

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

Conventional	48.0 dB
Hi-Fi	98.9 dB

capabilities and, of course, the MTS (multichannel television sound) decoder for receiving stereo broadcasts.

CONTROLS

As you might expect, such a versatile VCR requires a substantial number of controls. That Toshiba has been able to configure them in an attractive, unusual design is yet another advantage of the deck. With the front panel door closed, only the S-VHS indicator lights and a pair of genuine audio-measuring VU meters are visible. Once the front panel is opened, a vast array of controls are revealed on both the front panel and the inside surface of the door. The cassette slot is also here, of course. Below the slot are audio controls; to its right are the controls for editing, the S-VHS, dynamic noise reduction, audio fade and digital tracking switches and the main display area.

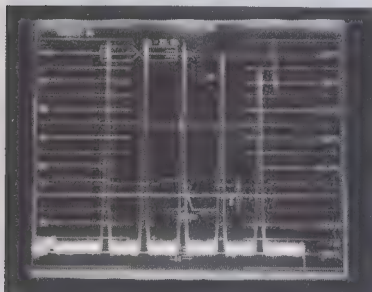
CHANNEL SEPARATION (left/right)
Hi-Fi **57.5/58.0 dB**

MTS DECODER SECTION

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS

(at 100% modulation)
Stereo (left/right) **65.4/65.0 dB**
SAP **77.4 dB**
Mono **61.6 dB**

Stairstep Linearity



TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION

(at 1 kHz, -20 dB)
Stereo (left/right) **.25/.36%**
SAP **.47%**
Mono **.18%**

FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at -20 dB)

Stereo **26 Hz to 12 kHz**
SAP **20 Hz to 5.0 kHz**
Mono **25 Hz to 2.8 kHz**

CHANNEL SEPARATION

(0 dB/-20 dB at 100% mod.)
Stereo
Left channel **34.5/39.4 dB**
Right channel **32.0/36.8 dB**

ADDITIONAL DATA

POWER REQUIREMENTS **55 Watts**

FAST-FORWARD TIME

(T-120 tape) **4 Min., 55 Sec.**

FAST-REWIND TIME

(T-120 tape) **4 Min., 45 Sec.**

DIMENSIONS

(HxWxD, in inches) **4¹¹/₁₆ x 18³/₈ x 16¹/₈**

WEIGHT

25¹/₂ Pounds

SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE

\$2,200

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL

(Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

The power button and usual tape transport controls are on the inside surface of the door. Programming and channel selection buttons are located here, too, as are additional editing and counter buttons.

S-video and regular video and audio inputs are accessible from the front panel, behind a little door under the VU meters. The rear panel has VHF and UHF in/out jacks, two sets of video/audio input jacks, S-video in and out connectors, a channel 3/4 selector switch, synchro-edit jacks and a pair of AC convenience outlets, one of which can be activated by the program timer.

The elaborate supplied remote control duplicates many of the front-panel functions. When the remote's own cover panel is lifted, many special effects controls are revealed. The jog/shuttle wheel is also on the remote, and it can be used not only for the usual frame-by-frame search, but also to manipulate the digital effects.

TEST RESULTS

Video frequency response extended all the way out to 5 MHz, where it was down by 10.9 dB. Response was better at the frequency of 4.20 MHz, down only 5.42 dB. The viewed picture on this S-VHS deck had plenty of detail, far more than what a conventional VHS deck yields. Signal-to-noise ratios were a bit disappointing; while 39.9 dB AM chroma isn't a bad measurement, we've seen better. Similarly, luminance measurements got as high as 43.5 dB—good, but not great. The VCR's noise reduction circuitry, however, boosted these numbers by 3 to 4 dB, depending on the level of noise reduction chosen. Pictures we viewed on this deck looked pretty good by themselves, but it's nice to know that boost is available when needed.

Stairstep linearity was good until we got to the last step, where deviation from perfect linearity reached 12%. As a result, in a video picture, a guy wearing a dark gray suit might look like he's wearing a black suit, but that's the extent of the damage this spec signifies in the overall image. Color saturation was very good, purity excellent. Overall, color reproduction was close to perfect.

The Hi-Fi audio circuitry performed impeccably, yielding a signal-to-noise ratio of 98.9 dB and delivering flat frequency response over the entire range of human hearing. Conventional audio results were acceptable, but as always, not spectacular. The real audio news in this deck is the MTS decoder, which was really outstanding. We can't remember the last time we saw stereo separation specs of 39.4 dB in the left channel and 36.8 dB in the right channel, but they're here. Stereo frequency response was very good as well. This is one of the few VCRs around that really gives you the most from TV stereo. The irony is that good TV stereo may be the least of the SV-F990's myriad attractions.

—Len Feldman

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JANUARY 1990 93

TEST REPORTS



SUMMARY

RCA S-VHS Camcorder, Model CC360

Filling out its Pro Edit line, RCA has packed this full-size S-VHS camcorder with a veritable armory of features. By doing so, the company offers consumers a battery of near-professional editing capabilities and special effects along with the increased picture quality associated with the S-VHS format.

The CC360 exhibited superb picture resolution and a minimum illumination level that—while not the lowest in the land—should allow decent shooting in poorly lit rooms. This, and such features as a 10-page titler and frame-by-frame recording, make the RCA CC360 a true home movie camcorder.

This camcorder also provides a measure of compatibility as well, since it can record and play back conventional VHS tapes—in case you're in the middle of switching formats. About the only drawback of the CC360 camcorder is its weight. When loaded with a cassette and battery pack, this \$1,899 camcorder tips the scales at 8 1/4 pounds. But considering everything that RCA has packed into the CC360 (about the only thing it lacks is Hi-Fi sound), it shouldn't be surprising that it requires a bit more arm strength than most.



FEATURES

The main attraction here is the CC360's inventory of editing features and special effects: a flying erase head for clean edits, an index marking capability, edit search for precise positioning of the tape while in the record mode, synchro edit, time-lapse recording, self timer and frame-by-frame recording for those clay animation shorts you've always wanted to make. (These are features we've also seen on RCA's regular VHS CC320 camcorder; see Test Reports, May '89 VR.)

There's also a built-in titler with 10 pages of memory. Each page can hold up to 48 characters, and the memory contains 50 commonly used words for creating titles. The titler also offers two different sizes and eight different font colors.

The CC360 has an 8x power zoom lens with macro, an MOS image sensor, variable-speed shutter (up to 1/2000 of a second), auto-white balance and a fade button. Displays include tape counter, battery level and a clock/calendar.

In the audio department, there's the mandatory built-in microphone (with a switch that eliminates wind noise) and a miniature, one-inch speaker mounted on the side. There's also an earphone jack for those con-

scientious folks who want to keep an ear on what they're shooting.

CONTROLS

The majority of the operating controls for the camera are located on the left side of the CC360; the auto-focus switch, self-timer button, shutter speed controls, auto-iris, color balance and fade controls, as well as the display button, review button (to look at the last few seconds of a scene) and index button are all here.

Below this section, a hinged flap opens to reveal a negative/positive switch for transferring print negatives onto videotape (using a film slide adapter) or for creating nifty MTV-like effects. Alongside this are date- and time-setting buttons and a time-lapse control.

On the right side of the camcorder is the usual handstrap/handgrip arrangement with a thumb trigger button and power zoom rocker switch. Near the back of the unit are the S-video hookups, a VHS/S-VHS switch and the cassette compartment. The battery pack, A/V connectors and DC power jack are all located on the back as well. All VCR controls are on the top of the CC360, along with the earphone jack. Also included is a thoughtful feature that allows you to snap the

LAB MEASUREMENTS:
RCA S-VHS Camcorder
Model Number: **CC360**
Serial Number: **925260100**

CAMERA SECTION

MINIMUM ILLUMINATION	4.3 Lux
HORIZONTAL RESOLUTION	450 Lines
COLOR CONTAMINATION	8 IRE
WHITE BALANCE	4 IRE
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS (optimum/minimum illumination)	
Red Field Chroma, AM	47.9/40.9 dB
Luminance	45.9/29.7 dB
MINIMUM FOCAL DISTANCE	44 inches (1 1/8 inch, macro)
LENS APERTURE	f1.2
ZOOM RATIO	8:1
FOCAL LENGTH	11mm to 80mm

Phase Accuracy



lens cover onto the camera when shooting, so that the cap doesn't flap around.

TEST RESULTS

With the S-VHS format, horizontal resolution measured directly from the camera came in at a high 450 lines. Through the record/play cycle, resolution still remained high at 425 lines. What's more, even if you're forced to hook up the CC360 to your TV through the set's antenna inputs, you will still realize a horizontal resolution of 350 lines—better than what can be received from a TV broadcast.

At optimum light levels this camcorder performed nicely; APEL measured video signal-to-noise ratios of 47.9 dB for chroma AM (color saturation and strength) and 45.9 dB for luminance (brightness). As the available light drops, however, so drops the luminance signal-to-noise ratios—and quickly. This means that you will get better results out of the CC360 if you avoid shooting in dimly lit basements.

Color contamination was an acceptable 8 IRE, and white balance (the amount of color that shows up on a neutral object) was a minimal 4 IRE. Color purity was very good, and phase accuracy was excellent—although colors appeared a little oversaturated.

For some additional real-world testing, we tried using the camcorder by following the "Quick Operation Steps" outlined in the owner's manual. In less than a minute, we had this feature-laden camcorder up and running. When we began exploring the Pro Edit and titling features (which require a little more time to become familiar with), we really appreciated the versatility of the CC360. Weekend home movie directors should find that this camcorder amply fulfills their needs.

—Len Feldman

AUDIO SECTION

MAXIMUM MIKE OUTPUT	.43 Volts
EXTERNAL MIKE SENSITIVITY	1.0 mv
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO	44.1 dB

COMBINED PERFORMANCE

HORIZONTAL RESOLUTION (video/TV output)	425/350 Lines
SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS (optimum/minimum illumination)	
Red-Field Chroma, AM (video out)	43.8/42.1 dB
Luminance (video out)	44.3/29.5 dB
Red-Field Chroma, AM (TV out)	43.4/41.8 dB
Luminance (TV out)	42.9/29.9 dB

ADDITIONAL DATA

WEIGHT (including battery and tape)	8 1/2 Pounds
DIMENSIONS (HxWxD, in inches)	9 1/2 x 5 1/2 x 16 3/8
POWER ZOOM SPEED	5 Seconds
SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE	\$1,899

All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).

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TEST REPORTS



SUMMARY Sony VHS VCR, Model SLV-555

Since Sony began producing VHS VCRs—recognizing the popularity of that format over its own Beta—the company's contributions to the VHS arena have been most welcome. This \$750 four-head, Hi-Fi deck is no exception, offering solid performance and fine design at a good price.

The SLV-555 was most impressive in its rendering of fine picture detail (measured video frequency was well above average) and accurate color reproduction. Stairstep linearity (the deck's ability to accurately reproduce the shades of gray between black and white) was as close to perfect as we have measured in years. While the rest of its video measurements were not quite state-of-the-art, all were above average.

For recording TV broadcasts, this deck boasts some particularly fine audio abilities. With a signal-to-noise ratio of more than 92 dB and channel separation coming in at more than 70 dB, the SLV-555 should easily please those looking for solid sound from a fine VCR.

FEATURES

For camcorder owners, Sony has provided input jacks on the front of the SLV-555 for easy access. Also here are a headphone jack and volume control.

Along with the regular inputs and outputs on the back, this deck also sports what Sony calls an S—for synchro-edit—input (not to be confused with the S-video jacks on S-VHS equipment). With this jack, the SLV-555 can be connected to another Sony VCR or camcorder when editing or dubbing from one to the other.

One-touch recording is possible with the SLV-555, as is index marking for access to those special scenes you want to find in a hurry. Before recording begins, the date, time and channel of the program can be automatically put on the tape.

In addition to being able to record pro-

grams broadcast in stereo via the deck's MTS (multichannel television sound) decoder, the SLV-555 can also record FM simulcasts and audio-only programs in VHS Hi-Fi when connected to a stereo tuner.

LP playback is possible with this Sony deck, although recording is only in the standard SP and EP modes. The SLV-555 also has auto tracking, a feature which searches for the optimal playback tracking position—a handy thing for those who have trouble adjusting the tracking wheel. For those who have no such trouble, tracking can be controlled manually as well.

CONTROLS

As we are seeing with more and more VCRs these days, most of this deck's controls are hidden away. With the hinged front panel closed, the only accessible controls are

LAB MEASUREMENTS:

Sony VHS VCR

Model Number: **SLV-555**

Serial Number: **818978**

VIDEO SECTION

FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at 2.0 MHz)

Video Output	
SP	-1.34 dB

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS

Red-Field Chroma (video output)	
SP (AM/PM)	45.7/40.2 dB
Luminance (video output)	
SP (100/50/10 IRE)	43.3/43.8/43.0 dB

AUDIO SECTION

(SP mode only)

OUTPUT LEVEL

Conventional	.35 Volts
Hi-Fi	2.70 Volts

THD AT REFERENCED OUTPUT

Conventional	2.30%
Hi-Fi	3.0%

WEIGHTED PEAK FLUTTER (DIN)

Conventional (avg/peak)	.30/.32%
Hi-Fi (avg/peak)	.020/.022%

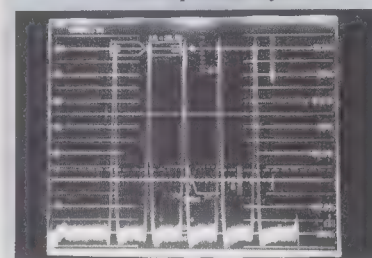
FREQUENCY RESPONSE (for -3 dB)

Conventional	105 Hz to 11.4 kHz
Hi-Fi	20 Hz to 20 kHz

HARMONIC DISTORTION (at -10 dB)

Conventional (100 Hz/1 kHz)	.55/.39%
Hi-Fi (100 Hz/1 kHz/5 kHz)	.48/.17/.63%

Stairstep Linearity



the power and eject buttons, as well as a button to flip open the front panel.

Lowering the flap reveals an assortment of additional controls and jacks. On the top surface, audio record level controls and the sharpness control are exposed. Next, under the cassette slot, are the input jacks (to accommodate a camcorder or another VCR) and the headphone jack with its own volume control.

Below, on the back of the panel, are the usual play, stop, record and tape transport buttons, as well as an edit button, which overrides some of the HQ circuitry in order to improve picture sharpness when dubbing from one deck to another. Other buttons located here include tracking adjustment, channel selection and quick timer.

The helpful on-screen menus are controlled by the supplied remote. Six on-screen menus allow you to perform a variety of

functions. The eight-event/one-month timer can be set and checked, and such information as tape counter, tape speed and tape remaining can be displayed on screen. There's even a demonstration mode that takes you through the functions and contents of the six on-screen menus. All this should prevent the would-be time-shifter from recording Arsenio Hall instead of David Letterman.

The rear panel of the SLV-555 has the standard array of inputs and outputs: VHF/UHF connectors, audio and video inputs and outputs, an AC convenience outlet and the aforementioned S jack for synchro editing with other Sony products.

TEST RESULTS

In the SP mode, at 2.0 MHz, video frequency response was off by a mere 1.34 dB, with some output observed even at the 3.0 MHz level. Luminance (brightness) signal-to-noise ratios were better than average at 43.8 dB—hence this deck's ability to provide a sharp, detailed picture.

Stairstep linearity was superb, deviating from perfect linearity by no more than 2%. Color purity was good as well.

As APEL's test results amply attest, the SLV-555's Hi-Fi and MTS decoder sections performed very well indeed. In Hi-Fi, frequency response was flat from 20 Hz to 20 kHz and signal-to-noise came in at more than 90 dB. Moreover, we found the MTS decoder section of this deck to be well aligned, delivering stereo separation in excess of 28 dB. SAP (second audio program) measurements were not so hot, but that should not be discouraging since this channel is generally intended for voice only.

Operating the Sony SLV-555 was a breeze; it was a simple matter to become familiar with the VCR's many functions. This is due, in large measure, to the SLV-555's bumble-proof, on-screen menus, which make programming simple. Sony took quite a while to join the VHS bandwagon after pushing its Beta format for so many years. Taking the if-you-can't-beat-'em-join-'em approach, Sony has done a fine job with this VHS VCR. —Len Feldman

ABOUT THESE TEST REPORTS

Each piece of video equipment we test is a factory-fresh production model—the same quality you would buy in a store. After each product has been tested by APEL—Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory, a leading independent testing facility headed by engineer Frank Barr—it goes to technical editor Len Feldman, an internationally recognized authority with more than 30 years' experience testing home entertainment products. He interprets the data and performs hands-on use tests of each piece of equipment, combining personal, practical experience with the most objective technical data available anywhere.

Color Accuracy



SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIO

Conventional	50.0 dB
Hi-Fi	92.9 dB

CHANNEL SEPARATION (left/right)

Hi-Fi	70.6/75.2 dB
-------	--------------

MTS DECODER SECTION

SIGNAL-TO-NOISE RATIOS

(at 100% modulation)	
Stereo (left/right)	64.2/64.6 dB
SAP	44.0 dB
Mono	70.1 dB

TOTAL HARMONIC DISTORTION

(at 1 kHz, -20 dB)	
Stereo (left/right)	.31/.32%
SAP	.59%
Mono	.36%

FREQUENCY RESPONSE (at -20 dB)

Stereo	29 Hz to 12.5 kHz
SAP	310 Hz to 1.9 kHz
Mono	23 Hz to 2.7 kHz

ADDITIONAL DATA

POWER REQUIREMENTS

	27.5 Watts
--	------------

FAST-FORWARD TIME

(T-120 tape)	3 Min., 30 Sec.
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FAST-REWIND TIME

(T-120 tape)	3 Min., 24 Sec.
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DIMENSIONS

(HxWxD, in inches)	37 ¹ / ₈ x16 ¹ / ₂ x14
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WEIGHT

	13 ³ / ₄ Pounds
--	---------------------------------------

SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE

	\$750
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All measurements and charts supplied by APEL (Advanced Product Evaluation Laboratory).



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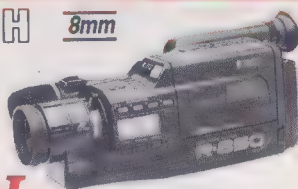
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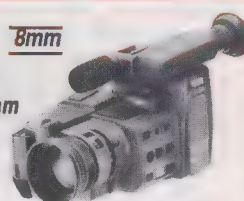
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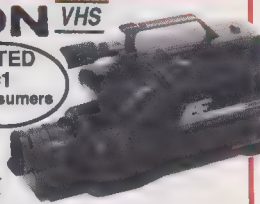
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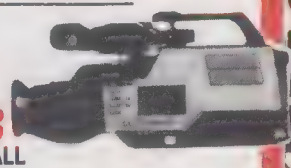
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6. Are you a member of a Mail Order Video Club?

☐ 1. Yes ☐ 2. No

7. If you answered yes to Number 6, to which club are you a member?

☐ A. CBS Video Club ☐ C. Time-Life Video Club
☐ B. RCA/BMG Video Club

8. What influenced your decision to join this club?

☐ 1. Offer ☐ 2. Selection

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LEXICON'S CP-1 FIXES SUBPAR SOFTWARE SOUND

Considering the rising popularity of surround sound as an essential part of the well-dressed home theater, it's hardly surprising to see companies previously identified with audiophile products jumping headfirst into the video market. Regrettably, some of these manufacturers seem to regard video almost as an afterthought. Given the abundance of "me too" products, it's refreshing to see that some companies are employing new designs aimed specifically at extracting the best that audio for video can offer. One such company is Lexicon, and its innovative approach to home theater sound is very much in evidence with their flagship surround sound processor, the CP-1.

Long recognized for their professional recording gear, Lexicon has designed the CP-1 as a flexible tool for producing spatial ambience from a variety of sources. In addition to faithful Pro Logic decoding of Dolby-encoded software, the CP-1 offers a variety of preset

integrity. In the case of video software, one of the most frequently encountered problems is "azimuth error." The term azimuth refers to the proper physical relationship between tape heads and tape. In order for the heads to reproduce all of the information contained on tape, the angle of contact between the two must be extremely

precise. If azimuth is off by even a small degree, the ensuing problems are highly perceptible: Dialogue comes out of the side speakers, effects come out from the

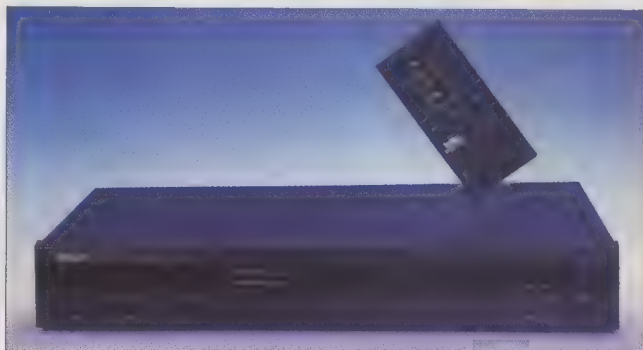
center and surround information is garbled among main and rear channels. Unfortunately, azimuth problems are all too common with today's high-speed tape duplicating techniques.

Sensing this problem as an inevitability, Lexicon decided to incorporate correction circuitry to deal with these errors as they occur. Since the CP-1 does all its processing in the digital domain, it's a relatively simple matter for the unit to

delay outgoing signals by a small amount: 20 milliseconds, to be exact, or about the same acoustic delay you'd receive sitting in the front row of a theater. This delay allows for enough time to read the input, make adjustments for azimuth or balance errors and choose directionality before sending the final processed signal out to the amplifiers.

hall shapes and sizes, three different levels of reverb, total control over the mix and the capability of storing up to 12 combinations in memory. It's hard to imagine needing more flexibility for music playback.

Music aside, what we really wanted to check out was the Dolby Surround mode and the advantages of the azimuth correction circuit. Running what



Steering things right: Lexicon's CP-1.

The real test of a surround sound unit, however, is what comes out of it, not what happens inside. In this regard, we weren't disappointed. After initial calibration of our test unit (which was aided by reference tones and an exceptionally friendly manual), we ran the CP-1 through several listening tests, each geared toward a different type of playback. With only two speakers hooked up, we tried out the "Panorama" programs, which are intended to produce a three-dimensional effect in a standard stereo setup. There was a subtle but discernible "filling in" sensation that almost fooled us into perceiving more speakers than there really were. While the viability of the supplied enhancement programs is largely a matter of individual taste, Lexicon has not skimped on listener choices. The CP-1 offers six different

we suspected to be less-than-perfect software through a five-speaker setup, we set the front/rear balance wildly off center, expecting to hear center channel information coming from the surround speakers. When we turned the auto-azimuth adjustment on (yes, it's defeatable), we were amazed to hear the results: After a moment of internal calculation, the CP-1 placed dialogue squarely in the center speaker while retaining sound effects in the rear channels. Although the final playback was simply what you'd expect from any self-respecting surround sound processor, hearing the CP-1 perform this under very stacked odds was impressive indeed. For this alone, the CP-1 would deservedly earn the proverbial thumbs up. That it's also a highly flexible unit that sounds superb makes it even better. □

FACT FINDER

Product: CP-1 Audio Environment Processor
Manufacturer: Lexicon
Address: 100 Beaver St.
 Waltham, MA 02154
 (617) 891-6790
Features: Twelve digital ambience-generating programs, including Dolby Pro Logic Surround; automatic input balance and automatic azimuth error correction.
Price: \$1,200

and user-definable ambience programs for standard stereophonic or monaural material. Pretty typical fare so far, but what really separates the CP-1 from other surround units is innovation along conceptual, as well as technological, lines. To our knowledge, the CP-1 is the first surround sound decoder to compensate electronically for imperfect source material—an impressive "real-world" solution to an unfortunately widespread problem.

As with anything that's subject to mass duplication, videotapes and discs are sometimes prone to minor (and often major) irregularities in final product

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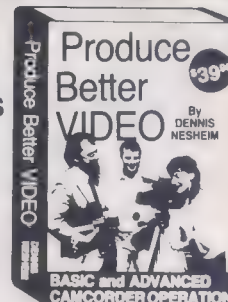


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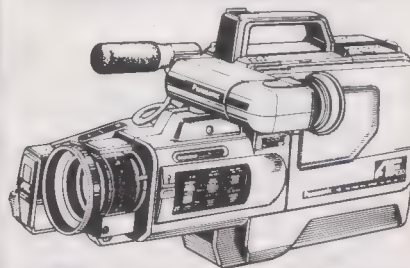
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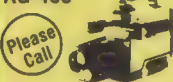
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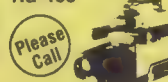
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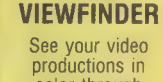
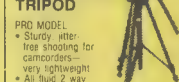
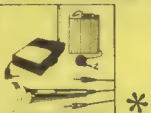
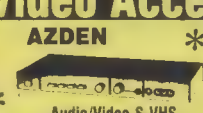
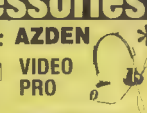
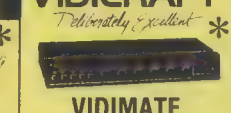
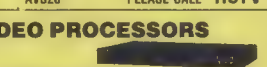
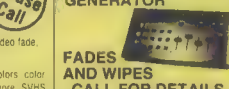
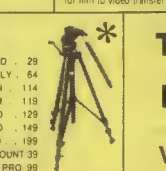
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...DIRTY SECRET

Continued from page 38

handling and loading practices. For example, an alarming number of the tapes APEL tested had tape leaders and trailers that were too long or too short (which can prevent the tape from playing in some VCRs).

In addition to the physical problems, a number of the tapes in our survey showed inexcusable laxness in the handling of the programs recorded on the tape. For example, a tape called *Time Out for Hilarious Sports Bloopers* had original image quality so poor, says Barr, "it looked like it was shot through a fishbowl." Goodtimes Home Video's copy of *My Favorite Brunette* suffered from unintelligible sound and a fuzzy picture, despite the packaging's claim of "superior quality."

As a final insult, all but five of the 18 titles in our survey were recorded at the LP (long-play, or four-hour) speed. For many viewers, this practice can result in nothing short of a nightmare. Since the LP speed was never sanctioned by JVC as an official part of the VHS standard, playback of these tapes on the majority of VHS machines is a compromised affair at best. Not only are scan, freeze-frame and slow-motion modes rendered completely useless (the screen simply blacks out during these modes), but normal play is often skewed and jittery. And, since the tape in LP moves at only half the SP (standard-play) speed, picture and sound quality in general are noticeably poorer. To make matters worse, the streaks caused by dropouts last twice as long in LP.

Some buyers might feel tapes recorded in LP are an acceptable compromise, if the price is low enough. Unfortunately, consumers often don't get to make that choice for themselves; many of the LP tapes on store shelves don't mention LP on the packaging (or bury it in a block of nearly microscopic type). Despite the drawbacks, however, duping tapes in LP—and even EP (extended play, or six-hour)—has already

become a way of life in the video industry (see "The Big Slowdown," July '88 *VR*). And, while *VR* readers have often complained bitterly about the process, industry executives cite a number of surveys indicating that "average" consumers don't mind a bit. For example, a survey undertaken by High-Speed Video, a major duplication facility whose work includes the EP copies of *Mr. Mom* and *Hoosiers* that McDonald's recently pushed in their national "MovieMeal" promotion, says that 90% of consumers surveyed felt that EP was of acceptable quality for in-home use. Joe Wischerath, High-Speed's general manager, concurs: "These tapes are an acceptable compromise. A good analogy would be comparing a hardcover book to a paperback—each has their own merit."

Perhaps the most surprising conclusions were gathered in a recent study conducted by VTR Video, a major Canadian duplication facility whose clients include Paramount, MCA, Vestron and HBO. Surveying a representative group of video consumers, VTR circulated tapes that were divided into four three-minute segments, each containing what the company described as "nondescript, movie-type" programming. The four segments were recorded at differing levels of quality, ranging from a perfect, 100% quality-controlled clip to a marginal segment with major picture and sound problems. The results of the survey were startling: One in three viewers claimed to see problems with what VTR insists were technically perfect segments. Another two out of five reported "imagined" sound problems, and a substantial 11% of viewers chose the marginal or poor segments on the tape as best quality.

These sobering findings led VTR to conclude that the majority of complaints about poor video are the fault of poor playback equipment, and worse, unrealistic expectations by consumers. "People expect a recreation of the movie theater in their home," says VTR president Hugh Copper, "and don't understand that their playback equipment is often just unable to do that."

But what about consumers who *do* know how to set up their home equipment properly and *can* see the difference between SP and LP? The increasing erosion in product quality hits serious video consumers—the very people most likely to buy tapes and build up their own libraries—hardest. As the industry concentrates only on the needs of the lowest-common-denominator consumer, it neglects the more discriminating buyer. These buyers aren't given a choice between cut-rate, low-quality editions of a movie and higher-priced versions; usually when a low-priced movie cassette hits the stores it is the only version available. Collectors either have to live with it, pass it up entirely, or, as many *VR* readers have done, make the move to laser videodiscs instead of tape.

Fortunately, some segments of the video industry are bucking the trend toward lower quality. JVC's campaign against unlicensed tapes has begun to target duplicators and video labels. The company has also retained APEL to conduct random testing of prerecorded tapes in the US market. Those efforts could lead to legal action against the more unscrupulous duplicators. Several of the biggest names in home video, particularly Paramount and Media Home Entertainment, have decided to make quality duplication a selling point of their sale-priced cassettes. Paramount, for example, includes a money-back guarantee on its \$14.95 tapes and promises top-quality SP duplication.

In the long run, these efforts could make good business sense for the industry. After all, if consumers get burned too many times by shoddy tapes, they may stop buying them altogether. In the meantime, consumers can help the cause in several ways: Make sure to look for the VHS logo somewhere on the package; if the tape doesn't display it, chances are the product is unlicensed—and dicey. Avoid buying tapes in sleazy, ultradiscount stores; saving a dollar or two isn't worth the possible damage to your VCR. Finally, if you do get stung, make your voice heard. Return the tape to the store for a refund and write the video company for good measure. Companies who've grown convinced that consumers couldn't care less about quality need to hear otherwise. □

READER POLL

What has been your experience with low-priced prerecorded videotapes? *Video Review* wants to know. Through our new phone line, we're conducting a reader poll on faulty prerecorded cassettes. If you'd like to participate, call *Video Review's* Fast Forward phone line. See page 23 for details.

...FUTURE PERFECT

Continued from page 43

for its 25-inch XBR-Pro. The company's TV marketing director, Brian Klosterman, couldn't say whether a 32-inch XBR-Pro introduction was imminent, though he did acknowledge that the 25-inch XBR-Pro design has been "awfully popular" for Sony.

Since every trend usually generates a countertrend, consumers will also see a few smaller monitor/receivers in 1990. Proton, for one, will debut an update of its 13-inch, MTS-equipped monitor/receiver. Sony, too, will offer 10- and 13-inch models designed for the cramped, yet quality-conscious, consumer.

Manufacturers employing special sound systems in their high-end sets (see "Big Sound Sets," Sept. '89 *VR*) all report wide acceptance of their designs. Sony, for one, plans to bow more SRS (Sound Retrieval System) sets. Magnavox will build Dolby Pro Logic and higher-watt amps into one of its JBL speaker-equipped projection models. Expect similar moves from most major TV makers. *Continued on page 115*

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CAMCORDERS

In the year following Sony's pocket-sized CCD-TR5, Panasonic's dual-camera PV-535, Canon's Hi8 stereo A1 and RCA's Pro Edit line, what can camcorder producers do for an encore? For the most part, it appears, introduce variations on last year's greatest hits.

Canon, for example, will bring out a model using the tiny FL transport mechanisms that figure in Sony's CCD-TR5 design. Canon and Sony are both playing wait-and-see on 8mm stereo.

Panasonic and JVC will continue their efforts to boost the VHS-C format in 1990. For instance, Panasonic vice president Stan Hametz expects engineers to up the recording time of compact VHS cassettes to 40 minutes in the SP (standard-play) mode (120 minutes in EP [extended play]) this year.

A big boost for the compact format in enthusiasts' eyes, however, is likely to come mostly from superior products. In that department, camcorders such as Toshiba's XS-1—currently available in Japan—seem ready to fit the bill. The S-VHS-C, Hi-Fi stereo model includes nearly every high-end feature available in a sleek, user-friendly design. Panasonic and Sharp also have attractive S-VHS-C camcorders in Japan: the former, a Hi-Fi stereo model, and the latter, a model with a color LCD viewfinder and 12:1 zoom.

In full-size camcorders, Panasonic's less expensive update of the company's current Automatic Image Stabilization system is due this summer. Also look for more digital effects and color enhancing lights on Panasonic's midprice models. According to industry sources, Sharp may up the focal-length ante with a version of its Japanese 16:1 zoom camcorder later this year.

AUDIO FOR VIDEO

As mentioned above, many of 1990's slickest audio products will actually be TV sets. Philips, however, plans a major new surround sound setup designed for the serious home theater builder. According to Philips' Birch Jones, the company's AV1001 digital sound processor (DSP) and AV1002 amplifier will offer Dolby Pro Logic Surround and 30 other ambience settings. Like Yamaha's DSP component, the Philips design will emulate different concert halls (such as Carnegie Hall). Elsewhere in audio, Kenwood may offer the neat desktop Dolby Pro Logic Surround sound system it debuted in Japan last fall. The compact components, designed for smaller viewing areas, offer 25-watt-per-channel amps across the front, with 10 watts each for the rear speakers. As the price of incorporating Pro Logic into products continues to drop, expect to see even more manufacturers getting into the surround sound arena. That should mean not only lower prices but a wider range of products.

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The Wonderful Wizard of Ours

BY JENNIFER STERN

When I was young, the yearly broadcast of *The Wizard of Oz* was a day of great excitement. In fact, news of it was telegraphed from desk to desk at school the whole week leading up to it.

It was always shown on a winter night just before the holidays, and my memories of the movie—particularly the tornado—are inextricably linked with those of snuggling up with the family in front of the TV while winter winds raged just outside our windows.

On that night, all rules were off. The rule that we couldn't watch more than one hour of television a day. The rule that we had to be in bed by 7:30. Even the rule about not eating in front of the TV went by the wayside (it was a long show—we needed sustenance).

I was mesmerized by that movie, and my fascination only increased the year we got a color TV and I saw that Oz was indeed much more beautiful than dour old Kansas. My younger sister, on the other hand, was scared to death. Whenever Miss Gulch appeared, announced with a burst of menacing music, my sister cried hysterically. She had to be carried out of the room and comforted. For years, she never made it to the part with the Wicked Witch of the West and the Flying Monkeys.

I realize now that my two-year-old son is growing up in a world much different from my own of only 28 years earlier, and it's partly because of video. (There are other reasons too, of course—crack, hostages in Lebanon, automatic bank tellers, acid rain—but TV, thankfully, somehow looms larger in a small child's world.) The yearly broadcast of Dorothy and Toto's adventures in Oz will probably mean nothing to him—why would he want to watch, with commercials, a movie he's already seen, as many times as he's liked, on videotape or disc? He'll probably never tremble at the sight of Miss Gulch, since at the sign of his slightest discomfort we'll be able to stop the movie with the touch of the pause button or even fast-forward her away. Instead of proceeding at its own relentless pace (aside from the commercials), the movie can now be controlled, reined in, and in the end made perhaps a bit less overwhelming.

While for my generation *The Wizard of Oz* was an event, an annual milestone earnestly discussed for days afterward, for my son it will be part of a cassette collection. He can watch it as many, or even more, times than we saw it throughout our childhoods. And when he's through, he can pop it in a box and put it on a shelf until the next time he wants to visit the Scarecrow, the Cowardly Lion and the Tin Woodsman.

All the changes wrought by video affect more than just a movie that was loved by his mom. Now that there's time-shifting, you no longer have to plan your evenings around a show that your child wants to watch. But the changes go beyond that, too.

At the age of three months, my son had already seen home movies of himself on TV. And although he then had no idea who it was up on the screen, he certainly knows now. ("Me," he exclaims joyfully, pointing at his chest.) But seeing himself on video holds the same fascination for him as looking in the mirror once did—as he grows up he'll find it increasingly less miraculous.

I imagine if he ever appears on a real TV show it will seem almost routine to him. On the other hand, my one trip over the airwaves (singing with a teenage religious folk-rock group on a local—very

local—television station) will always be, if not a cherished memory, then at least a vivid one, even though I have no souvenir videotape. But maybe we're all becoming blasé about TV. I still can't get over those ever-so-cool eyewitnesses on the evening news who explain the situation to the camera as if they were the network's designated correspondents. Yet who knows? If my husband points our camcorder at me enough, maybe I'll be cool, too, when confronted with The Real Thing.

But that may be the point. To me and my generation, broadcast television and, by extension, cable, are still The Real Thing, and home video is a toy,

a tool. But my son won't see it that way. In a few years, he'll be making his own movies—dramas, documentaries and, I imagine, satirical news shows—and we'll see the fruits of his imagination on our TV set, just as big and lifelike as anything the networks or Nickelodeon can present. To him, TV actors, hosts and newscasters won't be anything magical—they'll just be doing for pay what everyone else seems to be doing for free.

It's not that TV images will have less influence in his life than they did in mine. If anything, they'll have more. But where I never dreamed of being able to influence either the timing of the programs I watched or their content, he'll expect to be able to do both. In the end, that active involvement is surely preferable. Still, while we rush to embrace the control video gives us, let's pause to remember the magic we're leaving behind. □

VR contributing editor Jennifer Stern is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in *7 Days* and *Rolling Stone*. She is expecting her second child.

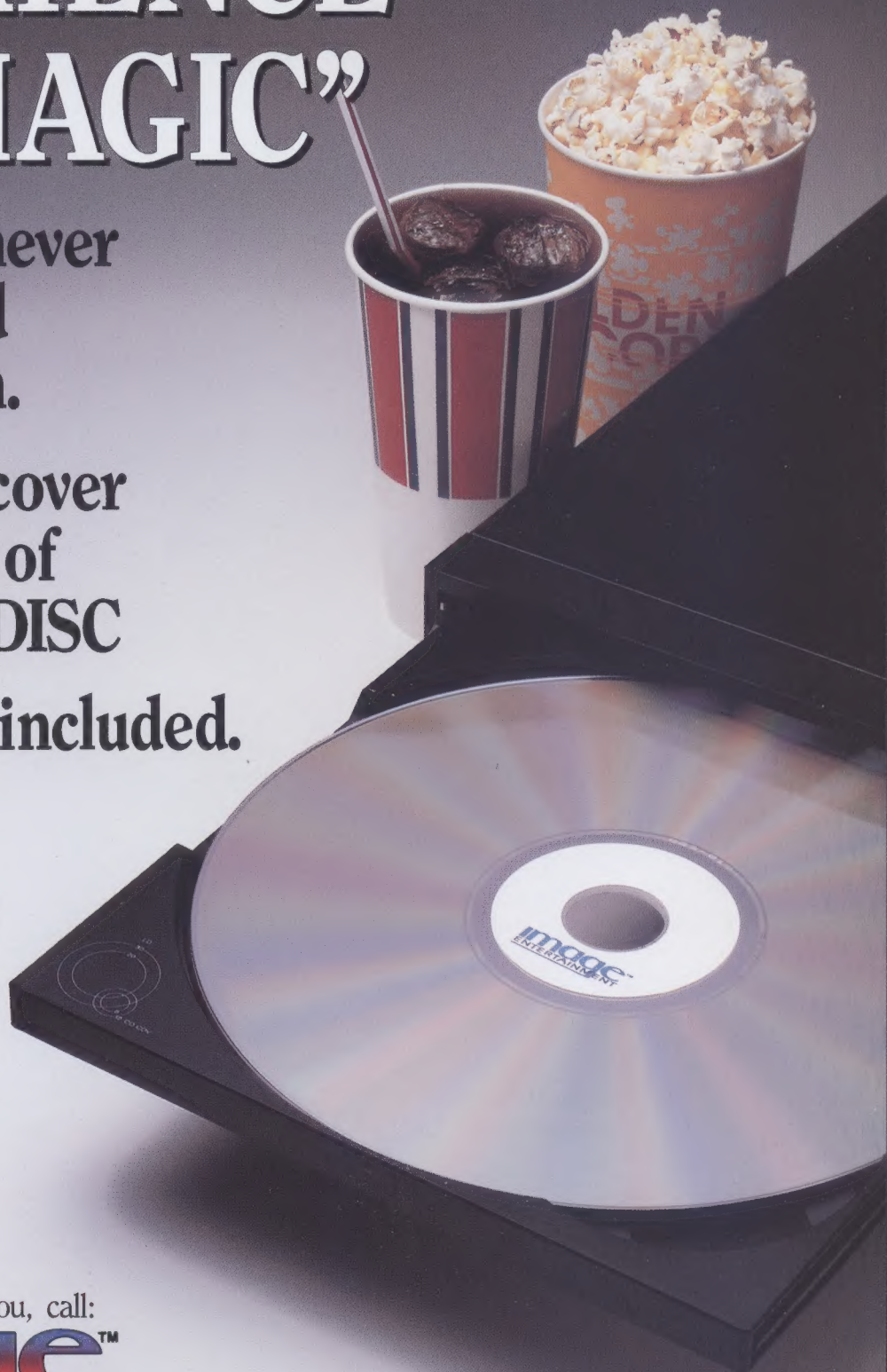


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